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A CRITICAL STUDY OF

SOME ASPECTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN BENGAL

BY

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CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

1945

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY DINABANDHU GANGULEE, B.A.,
SUPERINTENDENT, CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS,
48, HAZRA ROAD, BALLYGUNGE, CALCUTTA.

1586B—October, 1945—E.

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PREFACE

The publication of the Report of the Rowlands Committee has provided the occasion for the observations made in the following pages. Many of them are of the nature of a critical study of the recommendations of the Committee. But the writer is definitely of the view that administrative reform to be effective in an Indian province like Bengal must be of a basic character and to this end he has been constrained to examine factors of administration which the Committee had either under its terms of reference to ignore or for other reasons to take for granted. Discussions in many of the following chapters are expected on this account to have value of their own, irrespective of their bearing upon the Report of the Rowlands Committee. It should, however, be emphasised that the basic recommendations of the Committee, *e.g.*, those on Co-ordination, have been examined and analysed in some detail and their inappropriate character brought out into relief.

Reorganisation of Bengal's administrative machinery has now been proved to be urgent and imperative. The first and foremost desideratum is the gradual replacement of the so-called civil servants of to-day by a new body of men who may work with zeal and ability for the all-round uplift of the province. The author will feel amply compensated for his labour, if this brochure proves helpful to those who may have to undertake the

responsibility of reorganising the system of administration in this much suffering province.

I acknowledge with gratitude the keen interest which Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, President, Post-Graduate Council in Arts, has taken in this work from its very inception. In fact it was at his suggestion that this study was undertaken. But I am alone responsible for the views expressed in the brochure. I am also thankful to the gentlemen of the Calcutta University Press for the prompt publication of the work.

Asutosh Building,
University of Calcutta : N. C. ROY.
20th September, 1945.

I

INTRODUCTORY

The inefficiency of public administration in Bengal has been notorious for more than a decade and a half. That it is not the result of the Far Eastern War but is the effect of a gradual deterioration in ability and morale of our administrators, spread over a number of years, has to be admitted by all who have had any acquaintance with Bengal's affairs. The War, however, gave the last push to the collapsing structure which practically broke down in 1942-44 and has remained disorganised ever since.

It was towards the close of 1944 that the Government of Bengal became convinced of the fact that something must be done by way of ensuring efficient government "on modern and progressive lines." Accordingly by a Resolution (No. 5505-A, dated the 5th December, 1944) it set up the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee consisting of one Chairman, four members, one Associate Member and one Secretary. The Chairman was a member of the British Civil Service and is at present the Finance Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council. The two members and the Secretary belonged to the Indian Civil Service. Of the two other members one had experience of the administration of local bodies and the other rose from the Provincial Service to

be a high officer of the Government of Bengal. The Associate Member was evidently regarded as having specialised knowledge of the methods and technique of administrative work at Whitehall and was as such expected to be helpful to the Committee in framing recommendations for re-organising the administrative machinery of Bengal.

Appointed by Resolution of the 5th December, 1944, the Committee submitted its Report on the 30th March, 1945. In spite of the intricacy of the problem they were called upon to tackle the Committee thus finished its work with unexpected quickness. The Committee was "to report to what extent the existing administrative machine is adequate in structure, extent and quality and to recommend methods of improving it at all levels to render it adequate, for the efficient discharge of their work." The Committee was again called upon to examine in particular "(*a*) the suitability of the present territorial jurisdictions (*e.g.*, Divisions, Districts, Sub-divisions, Thanas and Circles); (*b*) the extent to which and the directions in which Local Self-Governing institutions may be utilised as an efficient adjunct to the administration with special reference to public health; (*c*) the desirability of employing technical personnel and its co-ordination with the existing structure of district administration (*d*) sources and systems of recruitment to, and conditions of employment of, the Public Services, with a view to (*i*) securing the best men with due regard to the declared policy of Government in respect of Communal reservations, and (*ii*) precluding discontent, irres-

ponsibility and temptation to corruption.'' Further the Committee was required '' generally to make recommendations for the improvement of the administration.'' In other words the task of the Committee was not only to get acquainted with the whole field of Bengal's administration as it is conducted from the provincial secretariat, the district collectorate, the sub-divisional offices, and the offices of the District Boards, Municipalities, District School Boards and Union Boards, but also to make recommendations for its better co-ordination and efficiency.

This was certainly a huge task. But the Committee, it may be repeated, completed it in about four months' time. What is more significant, the Committee is so sure about the correctness of its lines of investigation and the efficacy of its conclusions and recommendations that it has gone out of its way to urge in paragraphs 409-411 that its main recommendations should be immediately considered by the Government. '' We are naturally exercised,'' the Committee observes, '' to see that our report does not suffer the same fate as many of the reports of Committees which have preceded us during the last twenty years. We strongly urge that a senior officer should be placed on special duty immediately, charged with a task of obtaining the decisions of Cabinet on the principles involved in each of our main recommendations, and thereafter be made responsible for seeing that appropriate action is promptly taken to implement the Cabinet's decision. . . . '' Such language would not have been exactly appropriate

even for a Committee which had the necessary time and opportunity of digesting the vast materials which an enquiry of this kind should, as a rule, bring out, of comparing the state of things here with administrative organisations elsewhere, of thinking out lines of improvement at leisure and of making recommendations after mature deliberation. But for a Committee which was appointed by a Government Resolution early in December and which submitted its Report on the 30th of March next, such an effort to hustle the Government was certainly inappropriate. In view of the fact that the whole machinery of administration has become out of date and in view of the fact that the terms of reference of the Committte were too narrow for it to cover all the essential factors, this attitude on its part was particularly inexplicable.

Governmental organisations are par excellence the subject on which differences of view are natural and inevitable. What one set of men may regard as proper and appropriate, another set may declare as singularly incongruous and out of place. It is on this account very desirable that when the machinery of administration is to be changed in any essentials, there should be discussions from different quarters and in a somewhat protracted manner, so that out of such varied discussions some common lines of action may emerge. It is, of course, very true that public opinion in our country has not been as alert with regard to the suitability of the machinery of public administration as in countries like the United Kingdom and

the United States of America. In the former country, when sometime ago a Cabinet Committee was constituted for deciding upon changes in post-war administrative machinery, journals like the *Political Quarterly* of London made themselves a forum of very well-informed discussion on the subject in its various aspects. In the United States also the problem of post-war Government reconstruction is being studied not simply by the Government but by the public as well. The *American Political Science Review, e.g.*, published in its December issue of 1944 a long symposium by an able band of political scientists on *American Road from War to Peace*. A symposium of this character would educate public opinion and help the U. S. Government in formulating its final proposals on the subject. The address of Professor White as the President of the American Political Science Association, 1944, also contains views and opinions about reorganising the Congress as a machinery for supervising executive action, which should prove exceedingly helpful in achieving the end.

But in view of the fact that in our country public opinion was habitually less alert, the Government should have tried in a more systematic and determined way to interest the people in the work of the Rowlands Committee, so that many more people might have discussed this question both before the Committee itself as witnesses as well as in the public press and on the public platform. The terms of reference of the Committee and any questionnaire it might have framed should

have been given wide publicity. The evidences should have been taken and the witnesses examined, not in camera as it was done, but in public. Even when the Report of the Committee was published, the Government might have sent a copy of it along with the evidences the Committee had taken in course of its enquiry to different public bodies for opinion on its recommendations. But although the Rowlands Committee had not the advantage of having its own views and observations duly balanced against the opinions of other well informed people, it is regrettable that it used the peremptory language which we have quoted above in regard to the implementation of its recommendations. That such language should hustle the Government of Bengal into unwise adoption of changes in governmental machinery is still more regrettable. But actually on the 20th of June last the *Statesman* published an item of news which shows that the Government of Bengal though still operating under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935, has provisionally implemented some of the most controversial of the Committee's recommendations. For the rest, a senior member of the I.C.S. has been appointed as special officer to find ways and means to implement them. But it should be emphasised here that the Report ought to be discussed in all its bearings at least in the legislature before any of its recommendations is finally given effect to.

CHAPTER II

General Observations—Indian Civil Service

That the Report of the Rowlands Committee is not sufficiently comprehensive and leaves out of consideration some of the most vital subjects of provincial administration is testified to by the fact that it has had very little to say about the Indian Civil Service. It refers to it only casually in connection with the post-recruitment training of its members and the bifurcation of the executive branch of this service into Secretariat and District sub-branches.

But the Indian Civil Service is still the steel-frame of provincial administration. Herbert Fisher who was a member of the Islington Commission pointed out in 1915 that the Indian Civil Service was not a mere service but the Government of the country. The same view was reiterated in 1937 by Lionel Curtis, though meanwhile the Government of India Acts, 1919 and 1935, had been in operation. "Until 1919, it was, and to a great extent still is, the real Government of India," he observed.* The members of this body hold and occupy all the key administrative positions under the Government and have still the power, with the assistance and support of the Governor, to determine the policy of the Government. All the at-

* The Commonwealth of God : Civitas Dei, p. 561.

tempts so far made by the Indian public to reorganise the I.C.S. and make it consistent with the growth of responsible and democrate government in this country have proved abortive. When the Lee Commission held its enquiry in 1924, even moderate Indians like Sir Sivaswamy Aiyar urged in their evidences that futher recruitment of Europeans to the service should be discontinued. The Services Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference of 1930-31 suggested that the existing powers of the Secretary of State regarding the recruitment and control of the I.C.S. should be taken out of his hands and transferred to the Government in India. But the suggestion was not accepted. Only a proposal was incorporated in the White Paper that five years after the first operation of the new constitution an investigation would be undertaken as to the necessity of reorganising the Civil Service. But this proposal was also not embodied in the Act of 1935 and the Indian Civil Service remains as enthroned in power in 1945 as ever before.

This body, wholly European for well nigh a century and now half-Indian and half-European, was created by Lord Cornwallis with certain set purposes and to discharge certain definite responsibilities. It was to carve out a new administrative structure suitable for stabilising and consolidating British rule in this country. Among its routine duties were the collection of land revenue, the maintenance of peace and the administration of justice. By carrying out these functions the members of the Covenanted Civil Service would no

doubt minister to the welfare of the people to some extent. But the chief object in view was to maintain and perpetuate British dominion in India. It was accordingly a closely guarded preserve for European officers and no Indian, not even the well-trained adopted son of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, was allowed to break into this preserve.

From the middle of the last century there was an increasing agitation for the admission of Indians to the Covenanted Service as the I.C.S. was then known to be. It is also true that from the early sixties onward a few stray and very adventurous Indian young men found their way into this service by taking advantage of the competitive examination in London. But the fact that they were allowed to compete for and enter the Service at all was not very pleasing to the imperialist mind. The membership of the Covenanted Civil Service would entitle Indians to all superior offices under the Crown in India. But as the Duke of Argyll, the Secretary of State, reminded the Government of India in 1869, superior administrative offices must be as a rule held by Britishers in the interests of British dominion in this country to guard the safety of which was the first duty of the Government.* It is significant that in 1878 the Government of India actually sent to the Secretary of State a despatch proposing to close the Covenanted Civil Service to Indian candidates.†

* Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LV of 1879, pp. 306-7.

† The late Mr. Ramsay MacDonald characterised this despatch as disgraceful. See the Government of India, p. 104.

Continuous Indian agitation of course made it impossible for such a proposal to be entertained at Whitehall. But for decades there was only a sprinkling of Indians in this body which was regarded as a *corps d'elite* to supply officers to supervise and control different offices and departments of administration. The duty of the officers belonging to this Service was not so much to execute functions themselves as to see that they were properly executed by others. In fact, the Indian Civil Service was so organised and trained as to be an effective and efficient guardian of British rule in India.* This tradition of safe-guarding British rule in India has survived to this day not only in the strong European element in the I.C.S. but also in quite a large percentage of the Indian element of this body as well.

The European I.C.S. Officers happen to fill along with their Indian colleagues important offices like those of District Magistrate, Divisional Commissioner, Secretary to the Government etc. But what is more the European Officers happen alone to fill the pivotal positions of the Secretary to the Governor and Chief Secretary to the Government, which no Indian officer has so far been allowed to occupy in this province. When the primary object of the officers who happen to occupy so important, so vital and so crucial positions under the Government is to uphold British dominion here, they cannot be expected to become

* The idea which dominated the British mind, particularly after the Mutiny was : " We should legislate and govern India as a superior race." See Curtis—Dyarchy, p. 171.

an efficient instrument of Government in the age of provincial autonomy. Their extra-Indian recruitment and control and their other conditions of service appear to convince them that they are less the agents of a Government responsible to the provincial legislature and more the agents of the British Imperial Government. Not long ago, one European I.C.S. Officer wrote across a note issued by a ministry in this province that as an imperial officer he would have his own way and would not be bound by the instructions in the note. With such traditions surviving in the Indian Civil Service, it can never again become a safe instrument for provincial welfare and no reorganisation of the machinery of provincial administration will have any value so long as the members of this body happen to occupy the superior and pivotal positions under the Government.

It has been pointed out already that up to the close of the last War Indian administration was run on the exclusive initiative and responsibility of the Indian Civil Service. It of course did little in regard to the welfare functions which by that time had become a very important concern of the British Government in England. In India such functions were in fact utterly neglected. Nothing important for instance was done for education, sanitation, medical relief and economic uplift of the Indian people. But in regard to matters connected with the collection of revenue and the maintenance of law and order, members of the Indian Civil Service carried out their duties on the whole efficiently and zealously. But they

would perform these duties in their own way and would tolerate no interference from the Inidan people in any manner. That is why, as Mr. Lionel Curtis observed a few years ago, they tried to laugh out of court the proposal of partial responsible government in the provinces when it was first mooted. They could never believe that Indian administration could be conducted in any way except on their sole responsibility.

It was natural and inevitable on this account that they would become sulky and peevish when Indian Ministers, responsible to the provincial legislature, came to preside over some of the departments of the Provincial Government under the Act of 1919. A distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service itself has left it on record in an attractive book, *The Lost Dominion*, that after the introduction of the Reforms early in 1921 the members of the Indian Civil Service lost interest in their work. Henceforward they only marked time.* In fact not to do anything themselves nor to let anything be done by the representatives of the people became henceforward an ingrained habit with many members of the Indian Civil Service. Minister after Minister pointed out to the Reforms Enquiry Committee, presided over by Sir Alexander Muddiman, how their work had been obstructed by the members of the Civil Service. It is very true to say that most of the I.C.S. Officers have found

* For the inability of I.C.S. to cope with new functions, see Indian Civil Service and Provincial Autonomy, by N. C. Roy, *Calcutta Review*, February, 1940.

it impossible to adjust themselves to the circumstances created by the Act of 1919 and more by the Act of 1935.

It is known to everybody that a career in the Indian Civil Service has for the last twenty-five years and more ceased to be popular with British young men of high intellectual calibre. There was a time when conditions of work in the British Civil Service were not as attractive as they became later. On the other hand the Indian Civil Service had many allurements of its own. Consequently the cream of the British young men who sought an official career came out to India. But even during the last War, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald left it on record that this popularity of the I.C.S. with British youth was gone and that the standard of its recruitment was threatened.* In the middle twenties the situation was really so bad that men like the late Lord Meston and Sir Reginald Craddock had to move about from University to University in Great Britain to persuade British young men to join the Indian Civil Service. On the recommendations of the Lee Commission again leave rules and emoluments were also made more attractive for European members of this Service. But all the same British candidates of requisite calibre did not come forward to compete for positions in the Indian Civil Service. The result was that Indian candidates in Britain had an easy walkover, so much so that the balance created by the Lee Commission between the Indian and the British

* See MacDonald—The Government of India, p. 111.

elements was seriously threatened. Hence in 1936 new rules were promulgated * and Indian candidates were for all practical purposes excluded from competition in England. What is more, by way of redressing the balance new methods of recruiting British young men were resorted to. These desperate steps which had to be taken under compulsion of circumstances, could not but further lower the calibre of the European element of the Indian Civil Service.

It is useful in this connection to know something about the quality of the administrative branch of the British Civil Service into which the flower of British youth happens at the present time to enter. " A temporary Civil Servant " who is really a distinguished British academician contributed some time ago to the *Political Quarterly* † a very well informed paper on *Government Administration and Efficiency*. He has some significant observations to make on the subject. " In the first place the administrative capacity," he says " of the Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries that I have met have been, with one or two notable exceptions, remarkably low. . . . . They are intelligent, charming (for the most part) and conscientious men, but they are not men of imagination and action. They are slow, cautious and obstructive. They are " shrewd " but not wise, dependable but not creative. They are, too often, cynical rather than realistic. They are small

* See Recruitment of I. C. S. under new Rules, by N. C. Roy. *Modern Review*, June, 1936.

† April-June Number, 1944.

men." He again observes : " In the second place the average level of personal vitality in the lower ranks of the Administrative Grade is not high—except in the Treasury. . . . One gets the impression that few Civil Servants, over the age of thirty, get out of bed in the morning feeling that anything of importance will have happened or could happen as a result of their own activity during the hours that must elapse before they get into it (the bed) again. In the third place the Civil Servants are characterised, again with marked exceptions, by a certain amateurishness and intellectual isolation."

If these observations apply to the British Civil Servant, it may be imagined to what greater extent they apply to the average European member of the Indian Civil Service, who was, as a rule, far less capable at the time of choosing a career than the British Civil Servant and who has in this country far less opportunities of adding to his intellectual and moral stature than his compeer in Britain. In fact it can hardly be expected of the European members of the Indian Civil Service that as a rule they would become so enthusiastic about transforming the social and economic life of this province as to throw themselves heart and soul into this work. Apart from the traditions and conditions of their service and apart from their initial intellectual qualifications, or lack of them, their post-recruitment training is also not such as to ensure any capacity on their part to tackle effectively those questions of public administration which have now become so impor-

tant but which are not connected either with the maintenance of law and order or with the collection of land revenue. We shall have opportunity of taking up this subject at some length later. But it suffices here to say that the one-sided training which the members of not only the Indian Civil Service but also of the Provincial Civil Service happen to receive is to some extent at least responsible for the great muddle they made when the Province became confronted with a real crisis and when new functions were all on a sudden thrust upon the Government.

We have not so far made any particular reference to the Indian element of the Indian Civil Service, although many of the observations made in the previous paragraphs apply as much to the European element as to it. It should be repeated that before the last War the number of Indians in the I.C.S. was very small. In 1911 for instance it was pointed out in the Indian Legislative Council * that Indians were only five per cent. of the total strength of this Service. After the last War this number gradually grew no doubt but it is significant that even in 1921 Indians in the I.C.S. were less than thirteen per cent of the total number.† It was the Lee Commission which recommended that of the superior posts, twenty per cent. would be reserved for officers promoted from the provincial Civil Service, forty per cent would be allotted to Indian members of the I.C.S. and forty per cent to the European members of

* See Proceedings, Vol. XLIX (1910-11), pp. 494-98.
† Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol. II, 1921, p. 284a.

that body. On this basis recruitment has been as a rule made since 1924 and as a result of it Indian and European elements are now almost equal.

We have already referred to the fact that in the last century there was a good deal of opposition to the appointment of Indians to superior executive posts. Even when all efforts to shut out Indian candidates from the Indian Civil Service proved abortive and Indian recruitment to this body was taken for granted, there was a good deal of prejudice still against appointment of these Indian members to important executive posts. When the late Mr. J. N. Gupta of the Indian Civil Service appeared as a witness before the Islington Commission he was asked by Mr. G. K. Gokhale, who happened to be a member of this Commission, why most of the Indians in the Service were in the judicial branch. Mr. Gupta said in reply that they preferred the judicial line because in the executive branch they stood the risk of not having their services duly appreciated and of having their claims actually superseded.* It is significant also that in 1921 some Indian members of the I.C.S. had to go on a deputation to the Secretary to State and place before him their grievances with regard to promotion to superior executive offices. In the Council of State also the matter had to be discussed at some length and the attention of the Government of India had to be drawn specially to it. It was only after such efforts that Indian members of the Indian Civil Service received increasing oppor-

* Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XXI of 1914, p. 1127.

tunities of rising to superior executive offices, particularly in Indian and Provincial Secretariats. But the question is whether the growing equality of opportunity for the Indian members has rendered Indian administration more efficient.

While among youngmen in Britain the Indian Civil Service has become increasingly unpopular and the most talented of them have ceased to compete for entry into this body, it cannot be said to be so of Indian youngmen. In fact the most talented of the latter cherish still an ambition to enter this body and happen to compete with one another to this end. But although man to man Indian members of the I.C.S. to-day are as a rule superior in merit at the time of recruitment to their European colleagues, after a time they do not maintain this superiority in most instances. They hold their own no doubt against the European members. But this does not mean much. The latter, we have seen, have not proved of late either efficient or zealous. Many of the reasons which make for such loss of enthusiasm and zeal on the part of the European members do not and should not apply of course to the case of their Indian colleagues. India is their country. Indian people are their kith and kin. To throw themselves heart and soul into the work of administration should have been consequently normal with them. There are examples also which they should have taken care to emulate. Men like the late Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt have left behind a record of work which should have been an inspiration to their successors.

Even now, it is true there are certain Indian members of the I.C.S. whose patriotism, spirit of service and efficiency in work are above question. But many, if not most, Indian members become a class by themselves after entry into the Indian Civil Service. Traditions of irresponsible power associated with the I.C.S., the great emoluments it offers, out of all proportion to the general income of the people from among whom the Indian members are recruited, and the artificial life which these Indian officers are expected to live, cut them away almost entirely from their old social moorings and separate them almost wholly from the Indian people. They lose their zeal on this account to utilise their opportunities for improving the condition of their country. In fact once they enter the Civil Service, their ambition is satisfied and their end in life gained. They lose further interest in developing their intellect and in adding to their knowledge and attainments. Very few of them are known to have made a serious study of any of the manifold problems which as administrators they are expected to tackle. With the intellectual circles of their own country, they would not condescend to have any close association and when in foreign countries they would not as a rule utilise their stay to replenish their store of knowledge. In fact it may be said that they are as outmoded an instrument of work for the Indian democracy as the European element of the Indian Civil Service is. The sooner it is realised the better.

Twenty per cent of the superior posts are

known as "listed appointments." They are held by officers promoted from the Provincial Civil Service. At the time of recruitment there is hardly any difference in intellectual calibre between those who are appointed to the Indian Civil Service and those appointed to the Provincial Service. A few marks more and a few marks less make all the difference. But after appointment and the short period of training which follows it, experience in the two services is very different. While a member of the I.C.S. gets charge of increasingly important responsibilities very early in his career, the Deputy Magistrate has to work as an assistant. His duties are of a responsible character no doubt but he has to perform them under direction and control. Necessarily he becomes afraid of taking the initiative and discharging a responsibility on his own. This habit of deferring to superior officers becomes ingrained in him. Consequently when he rises to a listed post after twenty or twenty-two years of working in a subordinate capacity, he does not as a rule fit in well with his new environments.

The Provincial Civil Service in Bengal had at one time an excellent tradition of literary ability and mature scholarship. Members of this service happened to cultivate different branches of study with the zeal which specialists could hardly rival. With their great attainments and full and well-stored mind they were a very potent and efficient instrument of administration in the province. It is most regrettable that this tradition has now broken down. Most members of the service bid

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good bye to studies of any description once they are appointed to it. It is a common joke that the only book in which the members of the Provincial Civil Service are deeply interested is the Quarterly (now Half-yearly) Civil List published by the Government. This loss of intellectual interests is generally ascribed to many reasons. In the first place the members of the Indian Civil Service whom they emulate, even in spite of themselves, are no longer interested in intellectual pursuits. Secondly, it is a general complaint that members of the Provincial Service are promoted to higher and listed posts not on the ground of proved merit and ability nor on the ground of their general culture and wide outlook but on the extraneous ground of their standing well with superior officers. Consequently they try more to cultivate the favour of such superior officers and less to improve their mind and widen their outlook. Increasing emphasis on communal affiliations for purposes of promotion has also been known to damp the spirit and ardour of many an officer.

It is hardly necessary on this account to point out that neither the members of the Indian Civil Service, Indian and European, nor the officers of the Provincial Service, promoted to superior posts, are a fit instrument of public administration and national welfare. Long ago John Stuart Mill uttered a truism when he observed that "a bureaucracy always tends to become a pedantocracy". Nowhere has it been illustrated more disastrously than in India in general and in Bengal in particular. The bureaucrats in this province, enmesh-

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ed in their routine, appear to do regularly their day's work without however getting anything important really done. The administrative body of this province is now only a set of dead bones. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to breathe a new life into it without complete reorganisation. Only a great impulse from outside may possibly make the organisation responsive and active. This impulse, to be healthy, invigorating and permanent, must come from below, from the people and their representatives.

CHAPTER III

General Observations—Democracy and Local Self-Government

The members of the Committee whose Report is here under review appear to have forgotten altogether that they were writing about the administration of Bengal not as she stood before the passing of the Government of India Acts 1919 and 1935 but as she stood after these enactments had been passed. We are now irrevocably committed to the principle of representative government and in such a system the general people, particularly the electorate, are as important a factor of government as the Civil Service. Perhaps it will be wise to think that the people are more vital and crucial a factor than even the Civil Service which becomes under representative government only a tool, though a very necessary and indispensable tool. In any form of government not excluding despotism the people of the country are a factor to be reckoned with. Without the levelling up of their intelligence and the quickening of their interest and without their active and zealous co-operation, the government cannot attain efficiency by any standard. At all times particularly in modern times, efficiency in administration largely depends upon the resilience of the people. But how forgetful we are of this elementary fact!

Virtually nothing has been done so far to develop this resilience of the people of Bengal. Before 1921 the members of the Indian Civil Service felt happy to say that the Indian people were an inert ignorant mass. While they did nothing to make this mass educated and active, they made the existing inertia of the people an argument for not introducing any political reforms in the country. The last War broke this inertia to some extent and the political movements started and led by Gandhiji quickened further the political consciousness of the people. But only the fringe of the problem was touched. It was expected that the introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms in 1921 and still more the operation of the new Government of India Act since 1937 would result in the creation of ever widening educational facilities for the people and the increasing obliteration of illiteracy and ignorance. But nothing substantial has been done during the last twenty-five years "to educate our masters". In fact we have done nothing to liquidate the shameful legacy of 19th Century bureaucracy. That we are still enamoured of this legacy and not ashamed of it as all of us should be is testified to by the kind of attention which the Rowlands Committee has paid to the problem of education. It thinks it is important. But it thinks also that the improvement of communications is more important and must take precedence over the dissemination of education (para 14).

No stream can certainly rise above its source and when the electorate remains uninstructed and

indifferent, it is too much to expect that its representatives either in the legislature or in the local bodies should be actuated by public spirit and act ably and vigorously with an eye only to public welfare. The record of work which such representatives have had to their credit during the last quarter century is not very glorious. At least they have not come forward with alacrity to publicise corruption and remove inefficiency which have disfigured so much of late local and provincial administration in Bengal. Many of them have even in self-interest connived at such corruption and inefficiency. This record of work of the representative element of our public administration has undermined to a very great degree the old pathetic confidence which people in former decades had reposed in representative institutions.

But it is not the time to whine and to complain. To give up our faith in representative system is really to give up all hope about the future of our people and our country. If the representatives have not come up to the standard, steps must be taken quickly as well as persistently to create conditions under which the representatives may develop the will and feel the necessity for giving a better account of themselves. The first and most important step which should be taken in this regard is, we may repeat, the creation of ever widening facilities not only for the education of the young but for the general enlightenment of the adults. Everybody knows that the operation of the Primary Education Act of 1930 during the last one decade and more has resulted so far in

very little extension of the knowledge of even the three R's among the young people of this province. Sometime ago we heard of a scheme of adult education to be operated through the Sub-registrars. Even this half-baked, ill-conceived scheme has remained only on paper. If "first things must come first," as the Rowlands Committee demands, it is necessary that the Government must think furiously and act expeditiously for the spread of education. Without it no public health measures can be effective and in fact without it no administrative machinery, however well-regulated and however efficiently staffed, can be of help to the province.

Anybody who knows anything about government knows it for certain that if democracy is to be real and vital and not a mere stepping stone to government by cliques and cabals, it is necessary that the people and their representatives should be associated with the administration in as many ways and in as many centres as possible. The interest of the people in public administration must be kept up at all levels and that persistently and constantly. Not that elections should be held too frequently and at small intervals but that there must be opportunities, clear and unmistakable, for the influence and power of the people to be brought to bear upon administration as much at the provincial headquarters as at district, sub-division and village levels. Local self-governing institutions like the District Boards, Municipalities and Union Boards are to this end a valuable hand-maid to democracy. Alexis De Tocqueville, that great

French savant and statesman, observed a century ago that "local assemblies of citizens constitute the strength of free nations. Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools * are to science." After a century of wear and tear this observation retains its potency and remains a truism which few will dare to contest. In England there is a tendency to increasing administrative control of Whitehall over the local bodies. But the local bodies are, in spite of it, continuing as vital institutions in that country. Across the Atlantic local institutions were dubbed by Lord Bryce in 1888 as "the one conspicuous failure of the United States." For years the people of that country were really so exasperated with the corruption and inefficiency of local bodies that they allowed the State legislatures to deprive these institutions of many of their vital functions and hand them over to State agencies. But soon the tide turned. State constitutions were amended so that State legislatures might be compelled to leave in the hands of the local bodies a substantial measure of self-government. In many States again home-rule movement has struck root and cities have been given the right of even framing their own charters with the consent of the people.† If what was "the one conspicuous failure" in 1888 could after a few years inspire public confidence at least moderately, it is difficult to believe taht the local self-governing bodies of Bengal should for all time

* Democracy in America, Vol. I, p. 57.

† A. F. Macdonald—American City Government and Administration (1944), Chaps. four, five and six.

be damned and doomed, though they may not have been more unsuccessful in operation than the provincial government itself.

It is deplorable that the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee has not only not given us any independent lead in regard to the powers and responsibilities of the local institutions but has virtually endorsed the hostile attitude of the Provincial Government toward the District Boards. The Government of Bengal appears to be committed to the policy of provincialising the communication and public health functions of these Boards. The Committee recognises that in that contingency "The Boards will become *funtus officio*." But it is amazing that the Committee is not only not staggered by such a possibility but observes with the narrow self-assurance of a body of bureaucrats that "With the coming of provincial autonomy, it is no longer necessary to arrange 'exercises in local self-government'." This observation clearly illustrates the ideal and the object in view with which the Rowlands Committee made its recommendations for the better and more efficient administration of Bengal. It was blind to the fact that the government of the province was to cease to be essentially bureaucratic as it had been for a century and a half and become democratic not only in form but in spirit. It ought to have been known to the members of the Committee that no democracy could possibly be effective and efficient if all powers were concentrated in the Provincial Government and its agents. Somebody has des-

cribed an arrangement of this character as creating apoplexy at the centre and anaemia in the circumference. Such a top-heavy system, though worked theoretically in responsibility to the Provincial Legislature, will be actually bureaucratic in character and immune from people's influence and control. Such a system which will hardly evoke the interest and energy of the people will become a soulless machine and inefficient and ineffective on that account. Administration in Bengal must in fact be so organised as to break the lethargy of the people and not to perpetuate it, as to enlist the interest of the voters in local and provincial affairs and not to damp and undermine it. Such a purpose will be served more by developing the powers of the local bodies than by dismissing them as unnecessary "exercises in local self-government."

CHAPTER IV

Re-Grouping of Portfolios

By way of bringing the central structure of the Provincial Government into close harmony with the major functions of administration, the Rowlands Committee has suggested a re-grouping of portfolios to be allocated to the different ministries. Under the existing arrangement the Chief Minister may or may not take any portfolio of his own. During the last eight years of provincial autonomy there have been really speaking three Ministries in Bengal. In the first, Mr. Fazlul Huq, the Chief Minister, took up the portfolio of Education. In the second, he put himself in charge of the Home and Appointments Department. In the third, Sir Nazimuddin also made himself responsible for the administration of the Home and Appointments Department. Sometime ago a section entitled *Organisation and Methods Division* was created and made part of the Chief Minister's office. The Chief Minister, by virtue of his very position and by virtue of his being the leader of the group or groups in the legislature from which the Cabinet Ministers are chosen, becomes also to a large extent the leader of his colleagues. In Britain the Prime Minister is the sheet-anchor of the Cabinet system. Under his leadership the team works and the best Prime Minister is he who can best supervise and co-

ordinate the activities of the different ministries. In an Indian province the existing constitutional position of the Governor makes it difficult for the Chief Minister to undertake as leading a position in the Cabinet deliberations as he should. Nor is it possible for him to work for co-ordination among the departmental activities of his colleagues to a desirable and necessary extent. The Governor in his discretion may and does preside over the Cabinet meetings and consequently much of the leadership in such meetings is vested in him. In actual administration also he is not a cipher. In respect of departmental work he is in direct touch not merely with the Chief Minister nor only with the other Ministers. The Secretaries to the departments have also direct access to him and have to see him regularly in regard to the activities of their departments. His special responsibilities are so wide and so far-reaching that the last word in many matters has to be his. In view of these facts although the Chief Minister has all along been the co-ordinator of the activities of different departments, this work also has been shared considerably by the Governor.

The Rowlands Committee observes "we are in no doubt that the only Minister to whom would be assigned the duties of co-ordinating the machinery of Government and of co-ordinating the activities of those Departments operating in the economic and social field is the Chief Minister." Such power of co-ordination the Chief Minister has all along possessed but he has not, as it has been pointed out above, possessed it in full. The

Rowlands Committee has kept silent as to the power and authority exercised by the Governor. Consequently we are not very certain as to how the work of co-ordination which, when the recommendation of the Committee is finally accepted, will be specifically and emphatically allocated to the Chief Minister, may be actually performed. The Appointments portfolio which has so long been part and parcel of the Home Department and the personnel management function hitherto exercised by the Finance Department should also, it is recommended, be allocated to the Chief Minister. The latter allocation will be a deviation from British practice. But it may be stated that in Bengal the head of the Civil Service *e.g.* the Chief Secretary will be in charge of the office of the Chief Minister. This is not, however, likely to be an effective argument in favour of the change.* Similarly the arguments which have been advanced by the Rowlands Committee for allocating the Department of Publicity invariably to the Chief Minister appear to be rather flimsy. Such work may or may not be assigned to a Minister to be in charge of it exclusively. It may be assigned to the Home Department as it had been assigned before Sir Nazimuddin formed his ministry or it may be handed over to the Education Department. It may also

* It should be stated here that the post of the Chief Secretary is not an essential of public administration. It is only a survival of the days when the province was administered by a Lieutenant-Governor through the assistance of a number of Secretaries one of whom was Chief.

be taken over by the Chief Minister himself if he so desires. But there is no reason why the Chief Minister should be invariably in charge of it. Sometimes he may feel overburdened on this account. Nor is there any reason to believe that simply because publicity work may be assigned to another department, the activities of that department will be better publicised than the work done in other departments. In fact there should be no hard and fast rule about it.

There cannot be any reasonable objection to the combination of Finance and Revenue departments. In fact the logic is on the side of the recommendation in this regard. But so long as the question of Permanent Settlement is not disposed of finally, the Revenue Department may continue to exist on present basis. In fact the Committee has suggested the establishment of a new ministry of Land Reform. While the title of the new ministry is very suggestive, the Revenue Department has been familiar to the people for long. In fact there is nothing in a name and no change should be made for the sake of change. Only when the question as to the future of the land system is disposed of, the existing Revenue Department may be abolished and its fiscal functions may be handed over to the Finance Department. Until then there will be no justification for a change.

The Committee has recommended that Public Health functions should be taken out of the Department of Local Self-Government and constitute with Medical functions a separate Department.

In view of the fact that Public Health and Medical functions are to be provincialished, the Committee regards this recommendation as natural and apposite. Secondly, as after the withdrawal of these important functions from the Local Self-Government Department the work of the latter will become very light, the Committee suggests that Co-operation, Agricultural Credit and Rural Indebtedness and Relief should be combined with Local Self-Government. None of these two recommendations are acceptable to us. The Medical function was before the present emergency partly provincial and partly local. The famine and its aftermath made it necessary for the Government to take up under its direct management many of the hospitals and dispensaries run before by local bodies. We are not in favour of this arrangement being perpetuated. The Government on its own account should maintain some very well-equipped hospitals in district towns and in Calcutta. But apart from them the District Boards and Municipalities should be encouraged and given sufficient aid to start and maintain hosptials and dispensaries of their own to cater to the needs of the local people. As for Public Health functions they are pre-eminently the duties of local bodies. The distant Provincial Government can hardly make the people co-operate with the Public Health machinery which it may create. Under the Provincial Government it will become essentially a bureaucratic structure and as such not responsive to people's needs. We shall enter into further details at a later stage. Here it is sufficient to

point out that the control of the local bodies over the Public Health machinery is indispensable. In view of these facts we do not see why Public Health and Medical functions should not be combined with Local Self-Government. In fact it is necessary that the Minister who will deal with Local Self-Government must deal also with Public Health and Medical functions. On the other hand Agricultural Credit, Rural Indebtedness and Relief may very well go with either Land Improvement and Agriculture or with Irrigation which has been re-named by the Committee as River Utilisation, preferably with the former. Nor do we think much of the proposal that Excise should be combined with Finance. The former does not involve merely the question of collecting some revenue. It involves also a very important question of social policy and the Department of Finance which is interested only in the financial aspect should not be put in charge of it.

CHAPTER V

Co-ordination and Planning

Rowlands Committee puts a very desirable stress upon the development activities of the Provincial Government. The future of the Governments is inextricably bound up with the creation of increasing educational facilities, both general and technical, with the improvement of agriculture and public health, with better utilisation of the rivers, with the development of industries and with the growth of communications. In none of these fields the Govenrment to-day can show much to its credit. A great task is consequently ahead of it in post-war years.

Unfortunately the recommendations which the Rowlands Committee has made for the creation of a suitable machinery for post-war development are almost absurd in character. If accepted, as it seems they may be, unless the new Ministry is strong enough to turn them down, these recommendations will result in the establishment of a machinery singularly unhealthy and cumbrous. At the provincial level, there will be three committees one above another *e.g.*, a Technical Interdepartmental Committee, a Development Board and a Cabinet Committee on Development. Besides this three-storied organisation, there will be Advisory Bodies attached to Departments concerned with development work. The more com-

plex the machinery, the greater the number of files and the larger the number of notes to be recorded and the officials to be consulted, the more appealing does the system become to the bureaucratic mind. It is no wonder on this account that such an organisation has actually been recommended by the Committee, for post-war development.

The Cabinet Committee on Development is to consist of the Ministers in charge of Development Departments and to be presided over by the Chief Minister. The Chief Secretary to the Government will be required to act as the Secretary to this Committee. The Development Board would consist of the Secretaries to the Development Departments and the Secretary to the Finance Department. It will be presided over by the Chief Secretary and it will have a full time Secretary of its own with the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government. The Heads of Attached Offices would attend meetings of the Board when required. Besides its Secretary and the staff, the Board will have under it a number of experts and a bureau of statistics. All these staffs of the Development Board would be borne on the establishment of the Chief Minister's Department. Thirdly, it may be repeated, there would be a Technical Interdepartmental Committee which would consist of Heads of Departments and would be presided over by the Secretary to the Development Board. So tier upon tier the organisation rises into a pyramid and gives delight and exhilaration to the bureaucrat's heart.

By way of illustrating the nature of work of the Technical Inter-departmental Committee, reference is made in the Report to the building of roads. The road engineers might decide to create borrow-pits. But they might not be properly interested in their adequate drainage. But the Public Health Department, determined to extinguish malaria, might have other opinions about such drainage. Consequently the Rowlands Committee thinks that such technical problems are fit subjects of discussion and solution by the Technical Inter-departmental Committee. Its decisions should go as recommendations to the Development Board which on the basis of such recommendations would decide the technical details of its own scheme. But in view of the fact that Heads of Technical Departments would have access to the meetings of the Board and in view of the fact that the Board will be provided with an adequate technical staff of its own, we do not see why any necessity for the discussion of such technical details in another full-fledged technical Committee will arise at all. In the course of discussion of schemes in the Development Board itself their defects and anomalies may be pointed out by experts and removed thereby. In fact it seems that the establishment of a separate technical committee will only complicate work, retard progress and delay decision. We can very well visualise that when a scheme, say of road building, will be framed by the Development Board as the most important planning agency, it will be, after a discussion in the Board itself, sent to the Technical Committee. This

body by way of discussing the technical details which may affect other departments will really consider the whole scheme which is after all a technical affair. A considerable time will thus be spent upon the scheme at this stage and possibly more than one opinion will be recorded in the Report on the scheme. Then the matter will be taken for fresh discussion in the Board itself. So what might have been discussed and decided upon at one stage will be dealt with by two bodies. If decisions and not merely protracted discussions are wanted, the Technical Inter-departmental Committee may very well be dispensed with.

The Rowlands Committee has emphasised the importance of the Development Board which it regards as a planning body for post-war Bengal. If created, it will in fact be a crucial factor of legislation as well as administration. It will frame all schemes for the development of the province in different directions. But it will be a body consisting exclusively of officials. The Chief Secretary will be its Chairman and the Secretaries to the Development and Finance Departments will be its members. It will be a permanent fixture. The Rowlands Committee has not given us any idea as to the amount of time which the members of the Board may have to devote in this capacity. But in any event we know that planning for reconstruction will not only entail a good amount of labour but will require of the members that constructive imagination, that wide outlook and lastly that varied and detailed knowledge which the Secretaries to the Government in Bengal are not

as a rule reputed to possess. The Chief Secretary who will be the Secretary to the Cabinet, the Secretary to the Cabinet Development Committee, the Secretary to the Chief Minister's Office, the chief channel of communication with and control of the District Officers will be, it may be repeated, the Chairman of the Board. Where will be found an officer to combine in himself so many functions and discharge them all with imagination and efficiency? He himself as well as his colleagues will be as a rule members of the Indian Civil Service, which, as we know, can be given no credit for constructive ability at the present time. With a Chairman having too many things to do, and with members too busy with their departmental duties, the Board which will be entrusted with so much responsibility will hardly be in a position to cope with it. The Chairman and members, accustomed to perform only routine duties according to precedents and unaccustomed to strike out new lines of activity, may make the Board only an obstructive and not a constructive element in Bengal's public administration.

The schemes formulated by the Development Board will be submitted to the Cabinet Development Committee consisting of the Chief Minister and the Development Ministers. This Committee will be evidently advised only by its Secretary who has already presided over the Development Board and has committed himself both to the principles and to the details of the schemes which will be now under consideration. Nor will the Development Ministers have any fresh ideas from the Secretaries

to their own Departments. They too, are committed to the principles and details embodied in the schemes. The fresh ideas which the Ministers may bring to bear upon the schemes either from their own experience or from outside are likely to be objected to by the Chief Secretary as he has already made up his mind and may not like his pet schemes being either thwarted or even modified. His objections to such modification may be overruled by the Cabinet Committee. But when the schemes come in for consideration in the full Cabinet presided over by the Governor, it is not unlikely that such objections may be effective. The Governor may trust more the Secretaries who constitute the Development Board and may throw his influence on their side. If of course the Ministers are united in having some cut and dried views of their own, they may make them prevail against both the Governor and the Secretaries. But their views may not in most cases be very strong and clear cut and consequently they may be required to yield in favour of the schemes of the Development Board, though not quite convinced as to their utility.

It appears on this account that the Development Board will be another bureaucratic machine which will hamper responsible government in this province and become a menace to the growth of democracy in Bengal. The schemes formulated by the Development Board are likely to be in the form of memoranda which will be transformed into Bills by the experts of the Legislative Department. Consequently the Ministers who will be responsible

for the working of their Departments to the legislature will have very little voice in framing the Bills they will have to pilot in the legislature. What is true of the legislative measures is true also of the administrative steps to be taken in regard to the schemes. At present it is of course not true to say that many of the Ministers are pertinacious enough and have power enough to impose their will upon the legislative as well as the administrative policy adopted by the Departments. But as the Secretaries to their Departments are not already committed to a policy or a line of action, the Ministers may have their ideas, however nebulous and imperfectly worked out, accepted at least to some extent by the Departments. In course of a discussion there may be mutual appreciation of each other's points of view. But when the Secretaries will constitute one chamber and the Ministers another, no such opportunity will arise and the initiating body may very well desire to thwart changes proposed by the revising body.*

If a planning body is required at all, it should be a body outside the Departments and must be advisory to the Cabinet itself. This is not to say that no Secretary to a Development Department should ever be included in the planning body. In fact the constitution of such a body should be very

* In England where the control of the Minister over his department is so assured, the late Mr. Henderson when appointed Foreign Secretary in 1929 took good care to take with him to the Foreign Office three trusted experts from outside. See Laski—Parliamentary Government in England, p. 303. Here in Bengal such outsiders cannot be taken into the Secretariat to help the Minister. So, precaution should be taken that Secretaries may not at least become rivals.

flexible in character so that in the discretion of the Chief Minister any Minister or any Secretary may be included in it. But as a rule the planning body which must not be very large, should consist of three or four experts in different nation building subjects and three or four experienced men of affairs with proved capacity to weigh arguments and take a balanced view of things. It should be presided over by the Chief Minister himself or by any other person of standing to whom he may delegate the function for the time being. Such a body has this advantage that any scheme propounded by it in any subject may be re-examined in the Department concerned and in the light of the criticisms made and the changes introduced by the Department, it may be discussed afresh and decided upon finally by the Cabinet.

It is unlikely that such a new planning Committee will be necessary at all for some time to come. So far as we know Post-War Reconstruction Committees have been at work in this Province as in other Provinces. The Reports of such Committees must contain definite proposals regarding the future activities of the Development Departments. Such proposals concerning a Department may be examined by a Committee, which must be headed by the Minister in charge and it may include in its membership not only the Departmental Secretary and a technical expert of the Department but also a technical expert of another Department which may have something to do with it. If for instance the proposals on secondary education are taken up for consideration, the Minister

in charge of Education should preside over the Committee which will include among its members the Secretary to the Education Department, the Director of Public Instruction and possibly the Inspector of Technical Education who is attached to the Department of Industries and not to the Department of Education. Under the leadership of the Minister in charge of Education this Committee will examine the proposal and make out of it a scheme ready for legislation and application. It will of course be discussed in the Cabinet. But as the Minister in charge of Education who has either included in the scheme his own ideas or has accepted for it the ideas of his official subordinates will defend it in course of such discussion, there is little risk of its being violently altered. Such a method combines in a satisfactory manner official assistance with political guidance. It does not create a situation in which the Ministers and their subordinates remain separate and defend or oppose schemes as distinct agencies. The Development Board as recommended by the Rowlands Committee must consequently never be set up or be abolished if it is set up before a new Ministry is formed in Bengal.

Co-ordination is the burden of song of the Rowlands Committee's Report. It is not satisfied with recommending a very complicated machinery at the provincial headquarters. It recommends also that at the district level there should be opportunity for such co-ordination, and here again of the bureaucratic variety. The District Magistrate has been the pivot of local administration for a

century and a half. It is because of this that there was so much objection at one time on the part of the British rulers of this country to the appointment of Indians in this capacity.

He has not been merely the executive agent in the district of this or that Department. He has been the local representative of the Government practically for all administrative purposes. The functions of the Revenue Collector were for a number of years in the last century kept separate from those of a District Magistrate and vested in a separate officer. In 1859, however, they were transferred to him. But two years later in 1861 the Indian Police Act was passed which separated to a large extent the police functions of the district and handed them over to the Superintendent of Police. In fact although the latter was to work in detecting and preventing crime "under the general control and direction" of the District Magistrate, he was to control the police force and the police work of the district in responsibility to the higher police officers, *e.g.*, the Inspector-General of Police and his deputies. When this arrangement had been worked for only a decade, Sir George Campbell became the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. He was a bureaucrat with implicit confidence in the divine despotism of the Covenanted Civil Service. He could not be reconciled to the arrangement under which the District Magistrate's authority in regard to police work should be limited to "general control and direction" and that also only in detecting and preventing crime. So he expressed his desire to make the District Magistrate again "the

general controlling authority over all departments in each district''.* It is significant that this observation of Sir George Campbell has been quoted by the Rowlands Committee in paragraph 70 as authority for its recommendation in regard to new jurisdiction and powers for the District Magistrate. This onlly shows that the ideas of Sir George Campbell and those of the members of the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee are the same, *e.g.*, intensive bureaucratisation of the administration.

That the Committee's ideas about public administration were in a state of confusion is testified to by the fact that it quoted Sir George Campbell and David Lilienthal in the same breath. As it has been pointed out above, Sir George Campbell advocated concentration of authority in the District Magistrate on the ground that the Covenanted Civil Service was the governing Corporation in India and the District Magistrate being a member of this Corporation and its agent in the District 'should have full control over everything that might be done within his jurisdiction. Tennessee Valley Authority of which Lilienthal is now the chairman works on principles diametrically opposite to those observed by members of the Indian Civil Service in running Indian administration. This Authority works with the one object of developing the whole region in all aspects and spheres. To this end it no doubt formulates plans and initiates lines of

* See N. C. Roy—A Monograph on the Separation of Executive and Judicial Powers in British India (1931), Chap. II.

action but it executes them in full co-operation with local authorities. In fact it helps in rousing the local spirit, otherwise dormant, in stimulating local energy and enterprise and in evoking the will of the local people for their own economic and cultural uplift. There is really speaking no similarity between the position which the District Magistrate holds in an Indian province and that taken up by the T. V. A. In fact to quote Lilienthal and Campbell together is to invoke the blessings of Christ and Anti-Christ at the same time.

It should also be borne in mind that when Sir Geogre Campbell advocated concentration of authority in the District Magistrate, functions of government were only of a police character and consequently few in number. But although the objective now is to revolutionise the nature of government responsibility and include within its ambit the discharge of an increasing number of duties, the Committee is still enamoured of the principle enunciated by Sir George. As the work of planning and co-oridnating is to be done on a provincial basis by the Development Board and the Cabinet Development Committee, so this work is to devolve upon the District Magistrate in regard to the territory under his charge. The provincial plan once approved of will be forwarded to the District Magistrate. It will be his responsibility now to give effect to it in his district through the agency of the technical officers posted therein. He will hold conferences with the Deputy Inspector of Schools, the Inspectors of Co-operative Societies, the District

Agriculture Officer, the Civil Surgeon and other similar functionaries. In such conferences a plan for development in different directions will be formulated and the technical officers, just referred to, will be required to give effect to it under his direction and control. The District Officer in fact will take command of them and become their officer in charge. Even their tour programmes will have to be approved of by him. At the same time in respect of the technical aspects of their work, they will be under the control and supervision of their own departmental superiors. In other words the technical officers in the districts will be required to serve two masters at the same time. This is, however, not the only blemish of the recommendation. Nor it is the most outstanding.

The District Magistrate, as we have seen already, is the mainstay of administration. He is a very hard-worked official. In earlier days his outdoor activities were far more considerable than in later times. But as administration became more complex his desk work began to grow. Files multiplied and his drudgery increased. The District Administration Committee of 1913-14 was perturbed to find that the District Magistrate was " oppressed with desk work." * The late Mr. Ramsay MacDonald who paid two visits to India, both before the last War, and on the latter occasion as a member of the Islington Commission, observed that he had watched the District Magistrate at work both in his headquarters and in his camp and

* p. 18.

had " seen the same thing files, files, files." * This work has increased to a very great extent since he wrote. It is true that some of his old functions the Rowlands Committee wants to be transferred to other officers. But this will not lighten his load to any great degree. It will be the height of folly on this account to devolve upon this jaded and already hard worked official the great responsibility of putting into operation the plan of all round development in the district. It may be said that the responsibility of the District Magistrate will be really that of co-ordination and not of operation. But when he will be called upon to guide and control the technical officers and even to approve of or modify their tour programmes, he will become virtually responsible for the operation of the plan. Besides, it will be for him to report progress of work to the Chief Secretary. This makes his responsibility for the operation all the greater. It has again been pointed out by the Rowlands Committee that the District Magistrate has already a good deal of responsibility, though of a vague character, regarding the work of the technical officers in his district. What the Committee wants is to make his responsibility more definite, clear and unambiguous. But has this connection of the District Magistrate with development work been in any way helpful to the latter? So far the District Officer has not given any indication that this connection has been helpful. The number of schools, hospitals, co-operative societies so far

* The Government of India, p. 98.

established and maintained is rather a sorry reflection upon his enthusiasm and interest in such activities. In fact he is not only pre-occupied with other responsibilities but has as a rule little interest in such development work.

It should be emphasised that the type of men who are now appointed and will be appointed for years to the post of District Magistrate has neither the desired outlook for nor any necessary experience of development work. The thief-catcher and the thief-trier is hardly the man to be entrusted with such responsibility. To develop education, to stimulate spirit of co-operation among the people, to improve agriculture and grow industries constitute a type of work which only those who can put their heart and soul into it and can create and enlist popular enthusiasm and support in its behalf can perform with efficiency. If District Magistrates are placed in charge of such work, they will bureaucratise the atmosphere in which this work will be attempted, will keep the people at arm's length and consequently undermine popular initiative and enthusiasm, without which no development scheme can be a success. There is an alternative suggestion that sometime later the District Magistrates may, if necessary, be relieved of this development responsibility which may be transferred to separate District Development Officers. As these latter will be entrusted with the work of supervision and co-ordination, it is expected that when appointed they too will be chosen from the Indian Civil Service. Both on this ground and for other reasons which will be

noted as we proceed, this suggestion also has no fascination for us.

In case the District Magistrate or a separate District Development Officer is placed in charge of development work in the districts, it will undermine very largely, if not wholly, the individual responsibility of the Minister in charge of a particular Development Department. Every scheme must be, as we have emphasised already, formulated and adopted by a particular Department though with Cabinet and, wherever necessary, legislative sanction. The scheme must no doubt be formulated in full appreciation of the nature and kind of work done in other Departments. But once adopted it is the responsibility of the Minister in charge of the Department and his permanent subordinates to put it into operation and show the result. The recommendation of the Rowlands Committee is that the District Magistrate will operate the plan in his district in responsibility to the Chief Secretary who will be Secretary to the Cabinet no doubt but will not be otherwise under the control of the Minister in charge of a particular Development Department. Even the technical officers of the Department will work not under the supervision of the Minister in charge or that of his immediate subordinates except in matters purely technical. In all organisational questions they will be responsible to the District Magistrate and through him to the Chief Secretary. This is an arrangement which can never be accepted without completely stultifying the principle of responsible government in the province. It must be known that the Minister in

charge is the head of his Department and he is to exercise directly his control over the activities of the permanent servants of the Department and not indirectly through his membership of the Cabinet. If the scheme of co-ordination as set forth by the Rowlands Committee is put into operation, the Ministers, particularly of the Development Departments, will be entitled to have their say on the administration of the Departments only when they will take their seats in the Cabinet meeting. This is going back to the system of executive government in India as it prevailed up to 1861. Under that arrangement the members of the Governor-General's Council were not in charge of any Department. They would only be important in the meetings of the Executive Council. But once the policy would be formulated and the lines of action settled, it would be for the Secretaries to the different Departments to put them into effect under the supervision of the Governor-General. This is a position which will be wholly inconsistent with cabinet government as it is practised in Britain, in the Dominions and even in India.

We may ask also as to what functions will be discharged in respect of the organisation of development work in the districts by the technical Heads of Departments. The Rowlands Committee has wanted the technical officers in the districts to come under the control of the District Magistrate in all organisational work and to remain responsible to their Departmental superiors only in respect of technical questions. As an illustration it has been suggested that the officers of the Educa-

tion Department in a district would be responsible to their own Departmental supervisors in respect of such matters as methods of teaching. Nothing can be more preposterous than the suggestion that the Director of Public Instruction should have nothing to do with the establishment and maintenance of schools and that he should be there only to determine finally the best method of teaching Geography or English. Similarly it seems insane that the Registrar of Co-operative Societies will determine only whether the interest charged by a credit society should be five per cent. or six per cent. and will have nothing to do with the organisation of co-operative institutions. In fact such organisation of work in respect of development of every kind must be left to the Heads of Departments and their subordinates. The District Magistrate should have nothing to do with such technical work of a development nature. Of course Heads of Departments and their subordinates will be acting only honestly and wisely, if in respect of organising the work of their respective Departments in the districts they consult the District Magistrate as they should also consult other functionaries and local bodies. This they will be required to do if they are to perform their work properly and effectively. The District Magistrate may offer them his advice, if he has any to tender. But this he will be doing not to discharge any responsibility of his own but to assist in the work of a sister department.

We may conclude this section which is devoted to the study of the co-ordination schemes of Rowlands Committee by inserting a quotation from

Lionel Curtis' letter to Mr. Bhupendranath Basu. He observes :

" Indeed, I would go so far as to say that your so-called provincial governments are scarcely deserving of the name. They are merely the Government of India operating in the provinces. One curious manifestation of this is the peculiar position of the I.C.S. in the provinces. The members of this corps are still expected to supervise all executive departments of government, although to a lesser degree than formerly. The Commissioner and Collector still supervise and report upon the schools, the police, the forests, the irrigation department, the Public Works Department, and so on. In a great measure the I.C.S. remains the Government of India in the provinces. This simply will not work under any system of real popular government which operates through a parliament and cabinet. In responsible government the unity which an executive must have is provided, not by the Permanent Civil Service, but by the Cabinet. The permanent officers are all grouped under one or other of the ministers, and any matters at issue between various departments are thrashed out between ministers in the secrecy of the Cabinet. The minister who is over-ruled must either resign or else be prepared not merely to accept the Cabinet's decision, but even to justify to the public a decision which he has contested with his colleagues. The system implies that ministers stand on a footing of mutual equality under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Members of the I.C.S. would have to be answerable to one minis-

ter whose position would be intolerable if his subordinates were constantly supervising and reporting on the departmental work of all his colleagues." *

This opinion was recorded during the last War but it is clearly applicable to the conditions of today as well. Researches in government during the last quarter of a century have not resulted in the discovery of a more potent arrangement under which cabinet government can be worked to ensure better advantages for the people. It is now thought necessary only to have a central research or planning agency attached to the government. But such a body must be not only separate from the existing departments, but should be worked as an advisory institution under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister.

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* Dyarchy, p. 107.

CHAPTER VI

District Boards

We have already pointed out in general observations in a previous section that local self-governing bodies are an indispensable factor of democratic government. If the people are to be saved from the blighting effects of a bureaucratic machine, such bodies should be strengthened and not weakened and obliterated. Unfortunately it appears from pp. 11 and 110 of the Report of the Rowlands Committee that the Govenment is contemplating the abolition of the District Boards and the transference of their powers and functions to an agency of its own. It is still more regrettable that Sir Archibald Rowlands and his colleagues have not given the Government any clear lead in this connection. They seem to think that such a step on the part of the Government may be regarded as retrograde by those who believe in democratic institutions. But at the same time they think that " exercises in local self-government " are no longer necessary. What is more the Committee suggests that if the District Board is abolished, a District Advisory Board may be constituted. So it seems that the Committee hardly knew its own mind. We do not see why it took such a halting and even ambiguous attitude in this regard. It ought to have been more clear, convincing and straightforward in its recommendations in this field.

District and Local Boards have been in existence in Bengal since 1885. The Local Boards enjoyed only some delegated powers and had no independent financial resources of their own. Many people were actually convinced that these Boards which had very little to do should be abolished and the functions they discharged should be resumed by the District Boards themselves. Accordingly a few years ago the Local Self-Government Act of 1885 was further amended to make such abolition of Local Boards permissible. In the Government Resolution on the working of District and Local Boards during the year 1940-41 (the latest available) we are told that in eight districts Local Boards have already been abolished and it is likely that the same step will be taken in other districts as well. Elections to the Local Boards have been direct but the elected members of the District Boards have so far been returned by the Local Boards. When the latter are abolished, elections to the District Boards will also be in every case direct through popular constituencies. It should be known, however, that one-third of the total membership of the District Boards is still nominated by the Government and that in some districts all and in some districts most of the Sub-divisional Officers are invariably nominated to the District Boards. Their influence again in the Board administration is far more than what may appear warranted by their numerical strength in the Board membership. In fact they determine to a great extent the activities of the Boards. It should also be emphasised that up to 1920, the District Magistrate was the

Ex-officio Chairman of every District Board. It was only after the introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that the policy of having non-official elected chairman was adopted.

It must be admitted that the District and Local Boards have never been in Bengal very successful institutions. But their failure to vitalise rural life and improve education, sanitation and communication in the province should not be attributed only to the fact that the local people have not taken sufficient interest in these institutions and that they have not been able to throw up capable men to take charge of them. For the first three decades and a half, as it has just been emphasised, the District Magistrate had been the Chairman of the District Board and his official assistants had also been associated with him as its members. It was under their leadership that the Boards had worked during that long period. We heard much of their efficiency. But if we consult their record of work we would not find any substantial trace of such efficiency. When in 1921, the District Magistrates handed over their charge of District Boards to non-official chairmen, roads were few and far between, the imparting of education was confined to a few not very reputed institutions, medical relief was limited to only a small number of dispensaries and as regards sanitation and public health, it was left severely alone. In fact the District Officers and their assistants who so largely dominated these Boards for three decades and a half introduced their own ideas of public administration into these self-governing bodies. They

possibly kept the files better and the little they did they possibly did well. But they never launched upon any scheme of comprehensive development in either education, sanitation or medical relief. Nor did they try in any way to evoke public interest in the work of the Boards. It is, however, unfortunate that this tradition of doing as little as possible has been continued even after the District Magistrates were replaced by elected Chairmen. But tradition, once set, dies hard.

Lack of funds has been another potent cause of the failure of the District Boards to rise to the expectations of the people. The total income of a District Board from all sources excluding opening balance varied in 1940-41 from two and a half lakhs to ten and a half lakhs. How many purposes could possibly be served in a district of the size of Midnapore with an annual income of only ten and a half lakhs? In fact chronic want of funds has very largely contributed to the absence of much constructive activity on the part of the Boards. During the last two decades public and official life has also been increasingly demoralised and corruption has grown on an increasing scale. The administration of the District Boards which has never been very clean suffered all the more from the prevalence of such corruption. Rise of communalism in local as in national politics has again been another factor of inefficient Board administration in recent years.

But although the Boards never rose to the standard of efficiency expected of them by the people, the Government generally held good opinion

of their activities. In the Resolution on the working of District and Local Boards in Bengal during 1939-40 we find the following remarks : " It is gratifying to note that the Boards made most of their resources and kept up the public utility services to the level previously attained by them. Cordial and harmonious relations subsisted between the district authorities and the district boards throughout the Province." Besides, there was a reference to twenty-two non-official persons who either as Chairman or as Vice-Chairman rendered, in the opinion of the Government, meritorious service in respect of local administration. In the Resolution on the working of Districts and Local Boards during the following year and published as late as 1944, we find the following remarks : " Although the routine administration of the boards was generally successful, there was no striking achievement or progress to their credit in any sphere deserving of special notice. This stagnation in the activities of the boards was due, not so much to any lack of interest or enthusiasm on the part of their members and executives, as to the financial difficulty which faced most of them and their failure to solve it in a proper and satisfactory manner. The members of the boards were, as a rule, keenly interested in all questions affecting public health and welfare, including the supply of good drinking water for which there was a very intense demand. But the boards were generally hampered by paucity of funds which was accentuated by adverse economic conditions."

It appears very strange that in view of these

remarks the Government should contemplate the withdrawal of public health and even communication functions from the Boards and thereby make them *functus officio*. This attitude on the part of the Provincial Government which, as we have emphasised already, is still run very largely on the initiative and responsibility of the Indian Civil Service, can be understood if we go into a bit of recent history. The replacement of District and Sub-divisional officers from the Chairmanship of the District and Local Boards respectively has never been to the liking of the bureaucracy. It was of the view that this step undermined the prestige of the local officers and diminished their influence with the people. Consequently it thought that something must be done by way of rehabilitating the old prestige and influence of the officials. Steps already taken could not, however, be retraced in a direct way. So indirect methods had to be resorted to.

The first step in this direction was taken when the public health scheme which the late Mr. C. R. Das asked the Government to adopt in 1924 was introduced in a very truncated form in 1927. Every police thana was now made a health circle in which there would be a small public health establishment consisting of a sanitary inspector, a health assistant and a carrier. These establishments would be financed by the Government but the District Boards would supervise and control them. It was, however, thought that as the District Health Officer and his Assistants where he had any would not be in a position to cope with the duties of re-

gular inspection and supervision, a local machinery of supervision should be set up. The Local Boards ought to have been as a matter of course entrusted with this responsibility. The members of the District Board in the locality might also, together with the Chairman of the Local Board and two or three other co-opted men, form a standing committee with a non-official Chairman. Actually the latter suggestion was accepted but with this modification that the Sub-divisional Officer was made the Chairman of the Committee. In fact it was largely under his guidance and supervision that the health units happened to work. So the first step towards the rehabilitation of official influence was taken.

Consequently these Officers cannot be exonerated from the responsibility for the failure of the health units. It must of course be known that the organisation itself was too half-hearted and inadequate to cope with the public health problems of the province. A sum of about thirteen lakhs which was annually spent by the Government on this scheme was too insufficient. A sanitary inspector with an assistant could hardly do anything for improving the sanitation of a large area covered by a thana. In fact not only very little has been done during the last eighteen years to educate the people in public health questions and to take preventive steps against the outbreak of epidemics but what is more no satisfactory statistics have been collected regarding the places which usually suffer from such epidemics.*

* See N. C. Roy—Rural Self-Government in Bengal (1936), pp. 97-105.

A more comprehensive scheme was therefore necessary and it was good that in 1940 a scheme entitled Reorganisation of Rural Public Health Services was formulated by the Department of Public Health and Local Self-government. Instead of one thana, two village unions would under the scheme become the unit of medical relief and public health. The first principle underlying this organisation was that preventive and curative functions would be combined. An officer who would be called the Rural Medical Officer of Health would be in charge of the unit and deal with both functions. It is not particularly necessary for our purposes here to enter into the controversy whether preventive and curative functions should be in charge of two separate agencies or should be combined in one such agency. Without going into the exposition of any theory we should however refer in short to Appendix X of the Scheme in which the duties of the Rural Medical Officer of Health were enumerated. Altogether thirty duties were to be entrusted to him. An officer on a salary of Rs. 50 rising to Rs. 100 per month will certainly be the last man to perform all these enumerated duties with enthusiasm and efficiency. If he did one, he would neglect another and ultimately the scheme would be a failure. In view of this it would be better in practice to keep separate the preventive and curative aspects of work and entrust them to two agencies. At the higher level of course it may be possible to combine the two functions. But, as it has been pointed out already, it is not necessary here to enter further into this contro-

versy. It is the second principle underlying the proposed organization which it is more pertinent here to discuss.

It was provided for in the scheme that the entire staff required for working this organisation of public health in the rural areas would come under the Public Health Department of the Provincial Government " for purposes of appointment, leave, pay, transfer and discipline." In other words " the District Medical Officer of Health, Assistant Medical Officer of Health, Rural Medical Officer of Health, Sanitary Inspector and the health visitor (when appointed) will be Government servants, but their services will be lent to the District Boards." But although lent to these Boards, they would not be under their control which would be exercised by the Provincial Government. This would be the second and a more vital step taken towards re-establishing Government influence and power direct upon the people. A very unhealthy relationship would, however, grow between the Boards and its officers as a result of the adoption of this scheme. The former would be responsible for rural medical relief and public health but would have no control over the staff which would administer these functions. Possibly on this account the Government of Bengal, as emphasised in the Report of the Rowlands Committee, is contemplating a more logical step and has decided upon the withdrawal of public health function entirely from the District Boards. This will be a logical step no doubt but a very unwise step as well. But there

is no reason why we should place ourselves between these two alternatives.

Under the existing arrangement the Health Officers are officers of the District Boards no doubt. But they are appointed on the basis of qualifications set forth by the Provincial Government. Their appointment and dismissal are again both subject to approval by the same Government. The qualifications of the Sanitary Inspectors are also determined by the Government and what is more on the requisition of the District Boards it is the Government which provided these Sanitary Inspectors. In view of these facts it is not reasonable to think that the officers appointed by the District Boards are incapable people. In fact it is not so much the remissness on the part of these officers as chronic scarcity of funds which has been responsible for the failure of public health administration. In 1940-41 twenty-six District Boards of the province could spend to this end only Rs. 43.35 lakhs. In other words in average a Board could spend a little above a lakh and a half for public health purposes including of course the payment of the staff. What really could be expected of an organisation financed so poorly? There is another argument advanced in the Government scheme referred to above in favour of the provincialisation of the public health service. As the Government would finance the organisation, it should be under the full control of the Government. On the face of it this argument is also without much value. Money can easily be provided by the Government on the basis of the grant-in-aid under which system local responsibi-

lity may be combined with Government supervision and control.

What is true of public health is also true of other functions of the District Boards. They may be efficiently tackled only on a local basis and should consequently continue to be the responsibility of the local bodies. The idea of making them *functus officio* should be thrown back to the cell in which it originated. But these bodies should have adequate financial resources either from independent sources of their own or from Government grants. Secondly, there should be arrangement for systematic and sympathetic supervision from above. Thirdly, for purposes of internal supervision the District Boards should be required to appoint executive officers of their own. Fourthly, steps should be taken to evoke greater public interest in the work of the local bodies.

As regards Government control, it is now exercised through the District Magistrates, Divisional Commissioners and Inspector of Local Works. In some cases direct control is also exercised by the Government. The Rowlands Committee has recommended the abolition of Divisional Commissionership but in any event the Commissioners and District Magistrates should cease to be supervising officers in respect of these Boards. It is of course well-known that the members of the Indian Civil Service hold the view that the local officers of the Government alone are fit and proper persons to supervise the work of the Boards. They know the affairs of the district at first hand and consequently may exercise the proper supervision.

But while this point of view should not be summarily dismissed it should be known that these local officers have never taken kindly to the local self-governing bodies. They have regarded the Boards as rival authorities and in consequence of this fact their attitude towards them has been more querulous than helpful. Besides, they have not, as a rule, the wide outlook which is so very necessary if one is to move out of routine and to stimulate the local bodies into new activities. It should also be remembered that busy local officers have hardly the time to think out schemes of improvement and development for local institutions. This is why the Rowlands Comittee has recommended the appointment of some Inspectors of local bodies. It is however strange that while the Committee recommends their appointment, it is at the same in favour of retaining the control over these bodies of the local officers. This is certainly an arrangement which will make for friction and cannot be supported. So the District Officers should cease to have any connection with these institutions. The Provincial Govenment should appoint a few Inspectors exclusively for this purpose. But at the time of appointment it should be seen that these Inspectors have not only nceessary administrative experience and adequate knowledge of the rural areas but that they have special training in local self-government and comprehensive acquaintance with the working of local institutions in progressive democracies. If such men are not available at present, they should be trained. Possibly some of the Circle Officers, who have shown imagination, enthusiasm and

grasp of affairs in their supervision of Union Boards may be chosen for further training.

At present more than one instance can be cited of the Chairman of District Boards in whom executive responsibility for Board's work is vested, absenting himself from the district during the greater part of the year. Some of them even reside three hundred miles away at Calcutta and go to the district headquarters off and on for the purpose of holding meetings. It appears that it will be impossible to stop this unworthy and even vicious practice. It may therefore be wise to deprive the Chairman of the executive responsibility and hand it over to an Executive Officer of the Board.

If the Inspectors of the local bodies are to perform their duties efficiently, they must not only point out the defects of the Boards' administration to the Board itself at a meeting called for the purpose but should in many cases publicise these defects so as to bring them pointedly to the notice of the rate-payers. To this end the main defects of administration should be tabulated clearly and pointedly together with the suggestions of improvement made by the Inspectors and hung up in prominent places thorughout the district. This would draw the attention of the public to the administration of the Board and help in the organisation of local opinion against any inefficient or corrupt practice of the Board. At present most of the mufassil people who read newspapers read as a rule only those published from Calcutta. In these, however, very little interest is taken in the work of individual local bodies except of course in the case of the Cal-

cutta Corporation. Consequently very few people happen to know much of the way in which their District Board administration is carried on. Local opinion will however be stimulated and local attention roused to some extent at least if the observations of the Inspectors regarding the work of the Board are publicised on the walls of the Union Board offices, and the Sub-divisional court buildings and other such prominent places.

The character and contents of the Resolution which the Povincial Government publishes on the working of the Boards should also be changed so as to make the report more informative and suggestive. The present practice is for the District Magistrates to forward their observations regarding the administration of the District and Local Boards to the Divisional Commissioners who embody them in their own Report on the working of such Boards within their Division. When these Divisional Reports are submitted to the Government, these observations and facts are summarised and with a short comment adopted as the Government Resolution. It is published usually a year and a half after the expiration of the period for which the observations are recorded. Sometimes it takes longer still. For instance, the Resolution on the working of the Boards during the year 1940-41 was published as late as 1944. The contents of these Resolutions again are dry as dust and few people take any interest in them. These Resoultions or Reports should be written in a more interesting manner, contain some essential information regarding the achievements and defects of

the Board's administration and embody suggestions for improvement.

To start *ad hoc* bodies and transfer to them functions which were either already exercised by an well-established local body or which might be exercised by it has been the policy of the Government for some years past. The establishment of separate District School Boards is a case in point. That this arrangement should undermine the position of the District Boards without helping the cause of education was foreseen by many in the province.* It is good that the Rowlands Committee also has now protested against it. The sooner the District School Boards are abolished and their functions re-transferred to the District Boards, the better.

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* See N. C. Roy—Rural Self-Government in Bengal (1936), pp. 91-94.

CHAPTER VII

Circle Officers and Union Boards

The Rowlands Committee has complained that the absence of the Revenue staff " which exists in every other province where the land is not permanently settled " is the main handicap of the administration of Bengal. This was the defect which was very prominently publicised by The Bengal District Administration Committee which was appointed in 1913 and which reported in the following year. By way of removing this defect that Committee had recommended the appointment of Circle Officers who would become the eyes and ears of the Government in the rural areas. But the Rowlands Committee has returned to the charge and thinks that " the area of jurisdiction of the Circle Officers is so large that the defect is only very partially remedied." Accordingly it suggests that " Circle Officers should be increased to one per thana." When the Committee makes this observation, it seems to forget that there are now more than five thousand Union Boards working in the province under the control and supervision of the district administrative staff. These Boards may not have been very successful yet, as we shall presently see, as an instrument of village welfare. But as eyes and ears of the Government in the rural areas these Boards and their Presidents must have been at least as

efficient as the Revenue staff in the temporarily settled provinces. The Government Resolution on the Working of the Union Boards in Bengal during the year 1940-41 (the latest available) points out that " the relation of Union Boards with the local officers, police and the district boards continue to be satisfactory. Special mention may be made of the valuable work done by the presidents of most of the Union Boards in connection with war efforts, census work and jute restriction propaganda. Some of them rendered signal service in counteracting malicious and panicky remours."

But the Rowlands Committee, unimpressed by such appreciation of work of the Union Boards and dominated by the mania of official co-ordination, has recommended that there should not only be a Circle Officer in each thana but that this officer should be a co-ordinating agency within his smaller jurisdiction in the same way as the District Officer is recommended to be in the district itself. He will not merely supervise and stimulate the activities of the Union Boards but " will prepare a Circle plan for his *elaka* to facilitate achieving his various targets, which will have been set him by the District plan, of primary schools, dispensaries, minor education schemes, tank improvement, etc." In carrying out this responsibility, he will be required to supervise the work of technical officers in many fields. In other words, except in regard to magisterial functions, he will be in his jurisdiction a miniature Sub-divisional Officer. In fact the Committee thinks that the Circle Officer may replace the Sub-divisional Officer in certain import-

ant matters and should on this account bypass the latter in approaching the District Officer.

It has been pointed out in a previous chapter that the powers of control and supervision over technical officers, which the Committee wants to be assigned to the District Officer, will be wholly unjustified on more than one very congent ground. For the same reasons we are also opposed to make the Circle Officer a planning and a co-ordinating agency in the thana area. Besides, to make the Circle Officer an all purposes agency will undermine the powers and prestige of the Sub-divisional Officer and in fact make his position almost redundant. Many of the sub-divisions may of course be very large and heavy and there may be an argument for reducing their size. But within the same sub-division there should not be two officers to go over the same field. This will only be either duplicating work or making the position of one quite untenable and unnecessary.

The Circle Officers were originally appointed with the specific purpose of inspecting and supervising the work of the Union Boards. The Rowlands Committee has rightly complained that duties other than these original ones have also been increasingly thrust upon these officers. The result is that it has not been any longer possible for them to pay due attention to the activities of these Boards. It is necessary if not indispensable that these other duties should be withdrawn from them as soon as circumstances permit. Their function and responsibility should be confined to inspection and supervision of the Union Boards. It is very strange,

however, that the Rowlands Committee which complains of the Circle Officer being entrusted with other duties, itself recommends that he should be an all-purposes officer in the circle.

The future of rural welfare in Bengal is bound up with the progress which the Union Boards may make in their activities. We have pointed out already and we may repeat it here that these Boards have not yet proved very successful in most cases. This is due to more than one cause. Without greater development of education among the village people it is futile to expect greater interest on their part in the work of public administration. We have emphasised already the necessity of ever-increasing attention being paid to this problem of village education and we may emphasise it further here. Secondly lack of funds has been with the Union Boards as also with the District Boards a very potent cause of their failure. The compulsory duty of the Union Boards is to maintain the village watch and ward and to this end they have to levy a rate upon the local people. Functions like education, sanitation, road-building are also undertaken by the Boards. But for these purposes they are to levy a separate rate which is not compulsory and whose proceeds are less than one-third of the proceeds of the tax for watch and ward. The grants made by the District Board are also in most cases too small.* In 1940-41 the total income including opening balance of the Union Boards was about Rs. 115 lakhs. In other words,

* See N. C. Roy—Rural Self-government in Bengal, Chap. XIV.

the average income of a Board including opening balance was about Rs. 2,300. More than half of this amount was devoted to *Chowkidari* duties. In view of this fact it was not possible for most of the Boards to do much for rural welfare. In fact there are many Union Boards which usually do not have a margin of more than three to four hundred rupees a year for welfare work. It is time that the financial responsibility for maintaining the watch and ward in the villages is taken out of the shoulders of the Union Boards and shifted on to the Provincial Government. Police function has not been given to any other local body in India. Rural watch and ward can of course be better and more conveniently looked after by the Union Boards than by a povincial constabulary. But at present while the Boards find the money, their control over the *chowkidars* and *dafadars* is not only not exclusive but also not very substantial. The *chowkidars* and *dafadars* are in fact more the agents of the district administrative and police officers than of the Boards. It is all the more reasonable on this account why the financial responsibility for their maintenance should be taken over by the Provincial Government.

The third cause why the Boards have not been so successful consists in the absence of systematic but intelligent and sympathetic inspection and supervision by the Circle Officers. If one such officer is in charge of thirty Boards, as it was the original intention, and if he is allowed to pay his attention exclusively to them, he may prove to be an effective guide, philosopher and friend to them.

But if he is to discharge this responsibility in the proper manner, he should have a systematic course of training before he is entrusted with it. Secondly, supervision over the Circle Officers themselves should also be in the same manner intelligent and stimulating. The fourth cause of the ill success of the Union Boards is of course very intimately connected with the first. As the ratepayers are in most cases uneducated, ill-informed and apathetic, the persons they elect are also not of the expected calibre. Besides, the President and his colleagues may act sometimes unfairly, inefficiently and even corruptly only because there is no systematic vigilance over their activities from below, from the people. But even in such conditions the work of the Boards may be possibly improved if at least the Presidents and Vice-Presidents can be given a course of training in some camp training centre. We do not think that the organisation of such centres is not feasible. In any event as the Union Boards are really the bed-rock of the future progress of Bengal, everything should be done by way of increasing their prestige and usefulness. To this end one recommendation which the Rowlands Committee has made appeals to us. During the emergency conditions of last three years several *ad hoc* Committees have been constituted for the distribution of food and other purposes in the village Unions. It is time that their functions are transferred to the Union Boards which as an elected agency are likely to be more responsible than these *ad hoc* Committees. There is, however, another recommendation of the Committee which should

not have been made and ought to be rejected. It is to the effect that the clerk to the Union Board should be appointed and dismissed by the Sub-Divisional Officer. This is a typical recommendation of a Committee of bureaucrats. It will only result in the creation of an *imperium in imperio* and lead to friction and trouble.

CHAPTER VIII

Recruitment and Training of Civil Service

The body of civil servants which is to assist the Ministers in formulating policies and in putting them into operation has become notoriously out of date in Bengal in organisation, in training and in methods of work. The ideals and constitutional position of the Indian Civil Service have become wholly anomalous in the province in which administration is to be run by the Ministers in responsibility to the Legislature and in which welfare functions like the promotion of education and sanitation have become as important as the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenue. Indian public opinion has demanded with increasing insistence for the last quarter of a century the discontinuance of further recruitment to the Indian Civil Service, which has during this long period been the chief stumbling bloc in the way of all reform and progress. It has even in fact stood in the way of efficient day to day administration. So the first essential to-day is that no further appointment should be made to this body. We know that this is a matter for the British Government to decide. But we insist that it is too vital to be allowed to hang fire *ad infinitum*.

Even if no new recruitment is made to the I.C.S. at the present and in the future, the province will remain burdened for twenty-five years to

come with a large but diminishing body of I.C.S. officers. Those of them who have already put in ten to twelve years' service have become too hardened in outlook and too deeply imbued with the old traditions of the service. If they can be persuaded to retire on proportionate pension, so much the better for Bengal. If not, they must be allowed to mark time as they are doing now. The junior element, however, should be given a systematic training in the new ideals and technique of public administration in a staff college duly constituted for the purpose. Such a college has been proposed for establishment in Britain in order that selected batches of British civil servants may, after they have put in about a decade's work at Whitehall, get a fresh training. It is true that there are many objections advanced against establishing such an institution. But in India a college like this will be singularly heplful both in the formation of new outlook and in the acquisition of specialised knowledge regarding problems demanding solution. After a nine months' course in this college some of them may be sent abroad to study experiments which have been made in social work in foreign countries. Some, for instance, may go over to Sweden to study the co-operative developments in that country. Some again may be sent to the United States to watch for a few months the T.V.A. at work and study how the co-operation of the local people and authorities is being enlisted by this organisation in the development of local resources.

Once recruitment to the I.C.S. is stopped, the

question will arise how appointments to the posts to which I.C.S. men in the senior scale are now appointed will be made. As regards judicial offices, there is not much of a difficulty. Already there are two other ways available for filling them—by promotion from the Provincial Civil Service (Judicial) and by direct appointment from the bar. Both these methods have their utility and should be resorted to. Only the scales of salary now offered to such apointees to equalise their position with that of I.C.S. judges will have to be reduced according to expert opinion. As regards the administrative offices, the question is whether appointments to them will be made from the existing executive branch of the Provincial Civil Service as appointments to listed posts happen now to be made. We think instead of following exactly this method, the Provincial Government should adopt some other arrangement. There has been a persistent agitation on behalf of the Bengal Junior Civil Service for amalgamation with the Bengal Civil Service (Executive). The Rowlands Committee has turned down this proposal on the usual ground. But in the interest of a simple and straightforward organisation the two services whose nature of duties is more or less the same may be amalgamated. At the same time a Bengal Superior Civil Service should be set up. Its cadre should be ultimately larger than what would be necessary to fill the executive offices now intended for I.C.S. officers. The salary scale should be sufficiently liberal not only to attract suitable men in the new age when other avenues of profitable employment will

be open to young men but also to give dignity and honour to the positions which the superior civil servants will be required to fill.

The next question is how appointments will be made to the Superior Civil Service. Fifty per cent. of them may be made direct and fifty per cent. may be appointed by promotion from the lower service. But such promotion must be made within ten or twelve years of service of the officers concerned. In other words those members of the lower service who have shown unusual mental alertness, grasp of problems and vigour in execution should be raised to the higher service before they lose their mental elasticity and fall into the rut of routine. Of course their names must be forwarded to the Public Service Commission which will make the final choice. But once chosen for promotion, these officers must attend the staff college for a session before taking up their new duties. Those appointed direct should also be required in mid-career to pass a session at this college to gain fresh knowledge, wider outlook and new value of things.

In Britain there is a school of opinion that some of the civil servants may be recruited at a comparatively advanced age. Sir Ernest Barker, who was for long Professor of Political Science at Cambridge, observed in an article in the *Political Quarterly* in 1936,* that those civil servants who would be employed in social service departments might with advantage be recruited at about the age

* p. 203.

of twenty-eight. This would make possible the selection of those graduates who have already acquired experience in some social service work. In 1944, in the same journal,* " A Temporary Civil Servant " who has already been referred to, made the following observation : " I think it is a mistake to suppose that recruitment to the Civil Service should take place exclusively at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. The Service needs a variety of experience, and there is no reason why it should be deprived completely of the services of men who have proved themselves to be good at administration. Few men can have done that at the age of twenty-two. There is no reason, however, why a small number of posts at a senior level (say one quarter of the posts held by the Assistant Secretaies) should not be filled by men in their early thirties drawn from outside the service by advertisement and open competition." It should be investigated if good materials may be available for recruitment to the Superior Civil Service of Bengal at an advanced age of thirty to thirty-five. There are more reasons than one why, if such materials are available, they will be more appropriate for recruitment. In the first place men appointed to the lower service will be less envious of them. At present a young man who misses very narrowly a position in the I.C.S. becomes as a rule very envious of one who secures it. Such a contingency will be avoided if men at a comparatively advanced age are recruited direct to the Superior Service.

* p. 99.

Secondly, superior and very responsible posts should not be occupied by callow young men as they happen to occupy at present. Thirdly this arrangement will create an opportunity for men, who have acquired some knowledge of administrative problems from outside, to get into the service of the Government.

In this connection of recruitment we should refer also to an address * delivered in January, 1939, by Sir Will Spens, Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Chairman for ten years of the Appointment Board at Cambridge and Chairman of the Consulative Committee on Secondary Education. In this address he pointed out that only a few first class men in general subjects could adjust to new conditions in actual work after they passed out of the University. Many proved a failure. The implication is that those who would like to succeed in an administrative career should concentrate, while at the University, on socio-economic subjects. The Public Service Commission also in recommending the syllabus for competitive examinations should give weightage to such subjects. This is no doubt at variance with the British tradition that classical scholars from Oxford made as good Chancellors of the Exchequer as trained and experienced city men could ever make. But circumstances are changed, problems have become more complicated and a socio-economic training is more apposite for civil servants. In any event this is a matter on which expert opinion should be taken.

* See *Times* of 14th January, 1939.

The Rowlands Committee has suggested that the system of post-recruitment training should be more comprehensive than now. At present for about a year and a half after appointment the civil servants take training in different branches of land revenue collection, in administration of criminal justice, in settlement operations and in the maintenance of law and order. The Committee is of the view that a systematic training in nation-building activities should also be given at this stage. But how far emphasis on development work can be combined with due emphasis on security and fiscal functions, it is very difficult to say. Possibly they will be too ill-assorted and may not be successful. It is at least time when criminal judicial functions should be taken out of the hands of executive officers. It is now over a century that agitation has been carried on for separating the function of the thief-catcher from that of the thief-trier. It is now easily possible to transfer the work of administering lower criminal justice to the Munsiffs or officers appointed exclusively to this end. This separation will make easy, at least slightly, the problem of training. In time it may be possible to withdraw revenue functions also from these executive officers and hand them over to other civil servants with specialised training in that work. The beginning may now be made by separating criminal judicial duties.

The Rowlands Committee has further suggested that the present practice of keeping an officer in the Secretariat for a period of four years and then sending him back to the district should be replaced

by a system under which an officer may give continuous service in a particular department of the Secretariat. To this end it recommends that in the fifteenth year of his service an officer who has meanwhile served both in the Secretariat and in the district should decide which branch he would elect. We agree with the Rowlands Committee in the principle of separation which it recommends but not in the details of its suggestion. The present system was introduced in the light of more simple conditions of administrative work which prevailed in the last century and for the convenience of the Indian Civil Service which constituted the governing corporation for India. The number of members of this Service was not very large and it was this small number which was to move about and control all offices of administration. "The corpuscles which formed the lifeblood of British policy in India are always in a state of circulation. Were it otherwise," wrote Sir Auckland Colvin * in the nineties of the last century, "the vitality of the whole body would perish. They are continually being pumped from the centre to the extremities, from the extremities finding their way back to the centre."

However useful this system may have been in breaking the monotony of work of the Civil Service and however suitable it might have been in a simpler age, it has become an anachronism at the present time. An officer who is a jack of all trades in the district finds himself at sea when con-

* J. R. Colvin—(Rulers of India Series), p. 38.

fronted with the work of a specialised nature in the Secretariat. He has not only no specialised knowledge of the subject to be handled but has even no acquaintance with the history of cases he is to deal with and dispose of. He is as good a layman as the Minister in charge. That is why the late Sir Harkishen Lal complained before the Muddiman Committee that as Minister he used to get no assistance from the so-called permanent staff. It is high time therefore that a special Secretariat Service should now be created. It is of course in consistency with modern ideas that officers in the Secretariat should have some direct knowledge of field work in the districts. So some of the civil servants after recruitment and training may be sent to the Secretariat and the rest to the districts. After three years of work, those at the Secretariat should be given some charge in a district and made to acquire there practical experience of the actual operation of the schemes of work as formulated in the Secretariat. Thereafter they should revert to the Secretariat and stick there.

CHAPTER IX

Public Service Commission and Communal Representation

There is an apprehension in certain circles that the elimination of the Indian Civil Service from the field of public adminstration will remove that independent check upon the vagaries of ministers and politicians, which is so very essential to good government. The members of the provincial and subordinate services, already amenable so largely to local political influences, will be without protection which the superior I.C.S. officers may now offer to them and will consequently be completely at the mercy of ministers and the political parties to which they are affiliated. To allow such a situation to arise, as it has been largely allowed to arise already, will be calamitous. This calamity may be avoided and the civil service of the province may become an effective and impartial body, if the powers of the Public Service Commission are widened and strengthened. The few pages (68-73) which the Rowlands Committee devotes to the examination of the existing functions of the Public Service Commission and of its relations with the Government are certainly the best in the whole Report. The acceptance of the recommendations made by the Committee will help to a considerable degree in improving the official atmosphere of the province.

In this connection it is necessary to emphasise that the sections * of the Government of India Act, 1935, which determine the powers and functions of the Public Service Commission were singularly misconceived. When the Government of India Act, 1919, provided for the first time for the establishment of a Public Service Commission† in India the idea at the back of the mind of the British Government was to set up a Comission with full authority in regard to recruitment and control of the Public Services. But the Government of India would not have any Commission with more than advisory powers. In view of this disagreement between Whitehall and Simla, the matter was held up for some years and then referred to the Lee Commission when it was constituted in 1923. Even after the submission of its report nothing was done for two years in regard to the establishment of the Statutory Public Service Commission. In 1926, however, Whitehall made a complete surrender to Simla and the Indian Public Service Commission with only advisory powers was constituted. The powers and functions then assigned to this Commission became the basis of the provisions which the Government of India Act, 1935, made regarding the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions which have been at work in this country since 1937. It is significant that Sir Ross Barker, the first Chairman of the Indian Public Service Commission, had protested very strongly in a comprehensive memorandum, which he submitted to

* Sections 264, 265, 266, 267. † Section 96 (c).

the Simon Commission, against the limited powers under which the Commission had to work.* It should also be emphasised that the Services Sub-Committe of the Round Table Conference recommended the establishment of Public Service Commissions with full authority. It was not only of the view that " recruitment to the public services shall be made through such Commissions," but was also of opinion that subject to periodical review by the Governor in his discretion these Commissions would have the right of determining the rules so as " to secure a fair and adequate representation to the various communities consistently with considerations of efficiency and the possession of the necessary qualifications." † In other words all aspects of responsibility relating to recruitment to the public services were almost absolutely to attach to the Commissions. The Government was to have nothing to do with them.

But His Majesty's Government in framing the White Paper proposals and the Government of India Bill refused to be influenced either by the memorandum of Sir Ross Barker or by the considered opinion of the Service Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference and provided only for advisory powers for the Public Service Commissions Consequently the Bengal Public Service Commission, constituted under the Act of 1935, may only make recommendations in regard to the syllabus of examinations when such examinations are to be

* Report of the Simon Commission, Vol. 15, p. 192.
† Report, p. 252.

held for recruiting officers to certain services. But the Government may alter and amend the syllabus if it so decides. The standard of examination including the " qualifying marks to qualify a candidate for appointment " can also be determined by the Commission only with the approval of the Government.* In regard to recruitment to a post the Commission again may be required to submit more than one recommendation in order that the Government may choose anyone in the list of two or three, and not necessarily the person considered by the Commission as the best. Again, under subsection (3) of Section 266 of the Government of India Act, 1935, the Governor in his discretion may, by regulation, specify the services and posts regarding which it would not be necessary for the Public Service Commission to be consulted. The Governor framed the Rules under this Section early in 1937 and published them in the *Calcutta Gazette* (Extraordinary), April 1, 1937. One of these regulations is to the effect that it shall not be necessary to consult the Commission at all in respect of appointment to those services and posts " the appointing authority for which is an authority subordinate to the provincial Government." As the result of the operation of this regulation appointments made by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies to the Co-operative Department, by the Director of Public Instruction to the Education De-

* In fact Sir Nazimuddin observed in the Legislative Assembly on 29th February, 1940, in reply to a question : " The standard of examination is not prescribed by the Public Service Commission but by Government."

partment or by the District Magistrate to the various offices under his control are exempt from jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission. No wonder that these appointments numbering many hundreds have given rise to a very wide dissatisfaction in the province and have resulted in a good deal of inefficiency in administration. It should also be referred to that by another regulation the Governor made all officiating appointmtents and appointments to posts of a temporary nature outside the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission. Unhappily this regulation has also provided a loophole to the Government to make appointments to the detriment of justice and efficiency.* We are glad to find that the Rowlands Committee has recommended that these defects in the regulations be rectified and the loop-holes of patronage be stopped.

The Rowlands Committee has in fact recommended that the regulations should be so amended as to bring within the purview of the Commission direct appointments to all services and posts the initial pay of which is at present not less than Rs. 75 a month. The acceptance of this recommendation as also of those regarding officiating appointments and appointments to temporary posts will improve the tone of the public services in Bengal. But there is only one apprehension in the mind of the present writer. At present although many appointments of a responsible nature and

* For full discusion of the powers and functions of the Public Service Commission, see "The Working of the Public Service Commissions in Bengal," by N. C. Roy in the Journal of Indian Political Science Association, Vol. III.

commanding far higher salary scales are beyond the purview of the Commission, recruitment to the lower secretariat service is within the jurisdiction of the Commission. The initial salary of this service is lower than Rs. 75 per month. The recommendation of the Rowlands Committee should not be understood to mean that appointment to this service on the ground of lower salary should be taken out of the jurisdiction of the Commission. In fact it will also be wise to bring within the Commission's control those appointments to the District Collectorates which command an initial salary of Rs. 40 and more per month. It should also be emphasised, as the Rowlands Committee appears to have emphasised in page 73 of the Report, that the Commission should have its way in regard to the methods of recruitment to different services and posts. The Government should yield to the rules which the Commission may frame in respect of the kind and standard of examination for making its choice.

If the jurisdiction of the Commission is widened it may be necessary to increase the number of members of the Commission. Of course more necessary will be the extension of its staff. When, however the question of enlarging its staff is considered, the question as to the basis of appointment to the Commission should not also be ignored. At present there is the statutory obligation on the part of the Governor when he appoints members of the Commission in his discretion to choose at least fifty per cent. of them from among those who have held office for at least ten years

under the Crown in India.* Actually of the three members of the Commission, one is chosen from the Indian Civil Service, one from other services and only one from outside. The Commission, if it is to be an instrument of impartial and efficient recruitment and if it is really to be a basic factor of good administration in the province, must consist of men of wide intellectual outlook, keen judgment, constructive imagination and a high sense of justice and fair play. It is unfortunate that both in the Indian Civil Service and in other services there are very few men who combine in themselves these qualities of head and heart. Outside the services also the number of men from among whom members of the Commission may be chosen is unhappily limited. Even those available may not come to the notice of the Governor who is expected to make these appointments without consulting the ministers. But in any event it is time that this matter is properly thought over.

In an earlier paragraph of this chapter reference has been made to the Services Sub-committee of the Round Table Conference recommending that the question of communal representation in the services was to be determined not by the Government but by the Public Service Commission. But this recommendation was not entertained by His Majesty's Government. This subject of communal ratio was also outside the terms of reference of the Rowlands Committee. But in paragraph 211, it incidentally refers to it and makes a recommenda-

* Section 265 (1) Proviso of the Government of India Act, 1935.

tion which, however, is likely to be innocuous and ineffective. It observes : " We have no desire to question, nor indeed do our terms of reference permit of our questioning, the soundness of the declared policy of Government in respect of communal reservation, but we do feel very strongly, and we would emphasise that in this matter we are unanimous, that in the filling of highly technical posts it would be a serious mistake, and one that would jeopardise the high hopes we entertain for the future of the Province, to rest content with anything short of the best men, irrespective of the community to which they belong." But which are the " highly technical posts "? If it is for the Government to select and exempt them from the operation of the rules of communal ratio, the recommendation of the Commission will remain only a pious but unrealised hope.

The evil effect of communalism is not again confined only to the highly technical posts to which the Rowlands Committee makes reference. It is noticeable throughout the services, high and low. It is unfortunate that the start was given in this respect by the British Government. As early as 1868 when the Government of India Amendment Bill, providing for the appointment of Indians to some superior posts, was being considered in the House of Commons, Sir Stafford Northcote, the Secretary of State, foreshadowed in course of his speech the appointment of Indians on a communal basis.* In fact the rules framed in 1879 under this Act

* Hansard, Vol. 191, 1868, p. 1214.

for appointing statutory civilians made it possible for the Government to distribute these offices evenly among different major communities. The principle now enunciated was more frankly embodied in the new rules framed* in 1889 for the competitive examination which had been held in Bengal since 1884 for direct recruitment to the provincial civil service. They now made it possible for the Government to appoint persons belonging to certain particular groups of people, irrespective of their position in the competitive examination. The tendency on the part of the Government and of the British Civilians who really constituted the Government was in fact to see that not the best men irrespective of communal affiliations were chosen for the public services but that different communities as such were duly represented in these services. This tendency is very prominently noticeable in the evidences of senior I.C.S. officers to the Islington Commission. Mr. Cardew, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, and Mr. Beatson-Bell, then the Commissioner of a Division in Bengal, urged for instance before this Commission † that all the groups of people including the sub-divisions of the Hindu community should as such be represented in the public services irrespective of the comparative merits of their cadets. But the Islington Commission, while regarding a fair representation of different classes and communities in the public services as necessary and desirable, set its face defi-

* See Supplement to the *Calcutta Gazette*, May 1, 1889.

† Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XXI of 1914, pp. 124, 788.

nitely against fixing a proportion of representation for different communities in Imperial and Provincial Services.*

But three years before the publication of the Report of the Islington Commission, the Government of Bengal fixed a communal ratio and decided upon the reservation of one-third of the appointments in the Provincial Civil Service for Muslim candidates.† This fixing of the communal ratio was proved to be at variance with the recommendation of the Commission. But all the same, once decided upon, the principle of communal reservation was not only maintained but gradually extended. For years before 1922, all appointments to the provincial and subordinate services in Bengal were made according to the patronage system. But in that year the principle of competitive test was introduced for recruitment to several major services. This, however, did not supersede the principle of communal reservation. The merit sytsem would only operate subject to the reservation that of the total number of posts to be filled in different services one-third must go to the Muslims and one-sixth to other minority communities. But although this ratio was sufficient to undermine the merit system, many of the Muslim representatives in the provincial Legislature were not satisfied with it and demanded still greater reservation for their community. In 1925, this demand was largely acted up to by Lord Lytton's government, which decided in

* Report, p. 33.

† Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol. XIV—No. 4, 1924. pp. 61-62.

that year to increase the Muslim percentage from thirty-three to forty-five. No wonder that atmosphere in this province became increasingly surcharged with communal feeling. It was in such an atmosphere that provincial autonomy was introduced in Bengal. The Muslim members of the new legislature returned through separate electorates and largely on communal tickets did not allow grass to grow under their feet. They immediately raised the question of further increasing the Muslim percentage in the services. On the 10th March, 1938, Maulavi Tamizuddin Khan, then not a member of the Government, raised in course of a budget speech the question of fixing a higher percentage of appointments for Muslims and Scheduled Castes. An assurance was given to him by the Government that the matter would be taken up for consideration at an early date. But as no announcement was made during the next few months, on the 24th August following a non-official resolution was adopted by the Legislative Assembly to the effect that sixty per cent of all posts should be reserved for Muslim candidates, twenty per cent for Scheduled Castes and the remaining twenty per cent for the rest.* As, however, the resolution was of too cut-throat a character, even the ministry of 1938 could not give effect to it without modification. But it was put into operation not long after in an amended form. Henceforward fifty per cent of appointments to all services and posts would be reserved

* See Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Vol. LIII—No. 4, p. 298.

for Muslim candidates, fifteen per cent for Scheduled Caste candidates and the remaining thirty-five per cent for the rest.

This ratio has been at work for the last six years. It has virtually made a mockery of the competitive system of recruitment even in those services where it has been adopted. By way of acting up to the ratio the Public Service Commission has to limit the competition to the candidates from a particular community and has been constrained to recommend names of persons not properly qualified, though they may have been qualified according to the standard fixed by the Government. It is no wonder on this account that the public services have suffered so greatly from the inefficiency of officers who have been recruited to man them. This is certainly a great evil. But the greater evil is that when civil servants are recruited not on the strict ground of merit but largely by virtue of their communal affiliations, they continue to emphasise those affiliations after recruitment and allow them to determine very largely their activities as officers of the Government. This is very largely responsible for the deterioration of morale in the public services. Unfortunately it does not appear that this principle of communal ratio can now be gone back upon until better sense comes to prevail in those communities which asked for it. Meanwhile it continues to be too political in character to be disposed of by the Public Service Commission on its own responsibility. If from the start the principle of communal reservation had not been adopted by the Government, possibly this matter

might have been a subject for decision by Public Service Commission. But at this time of the day without the awakening of public opinion nothing can possibly be done towards erradicating this evil. But the Public Service Commission itself may quicken public opinion against the system by embodying in the annual reports its full and frank opinion about the working of the ratio and its effect on the public services and public administration.